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ARTINGALE CASTLE.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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ARTINGALE CASTLE.



BOOK IV.—*continued.*

LOVE, THEY SAY, IS BLIND.



CHAPTER VII.

SILLCHESTER RE-VISITED.

MEANWHILE, the works at the Castle had been making rapid progress. There be proverbs which speak of the devil's driving; but there is no driving in such matters as that in hand at Artingale equal to that effected by ready cash, and plenty of it. Abundance of hands, active superintendence, and ready payment pushed on the work apace. And the new arrangements of the interior began to make some show of what they promised. Lancaster continued to give the greatest satisfaction both to his ostensible employer, Sir Hildebrand, who generally passed the greater part of the hours of the day in

sauntering about the building, and to the real paymaster of the work, Mr. Farland, whose interest in the progress of it was not less, and far more intelligent than that of the baronet. The young architect still contrived to have always an hour to spare for Miss Mary's drawing-lesson, after the Castle luncheon hour ; and the evenings continued to be spent with the two, and sometimes with the three ladies in making music. Lancaster would still have found time also for helping Bertha with his counsel and corrections, in the matter of the drawings for the projected work in illustration of the Castle. For he was one of those men who, the more they have to do, seem always to pull the more time out of some Fortunatus' purse full of that article. But, somehow or other, since the day of the sheep-shearing, little Bertha had not made so much progress with her work as she had done previously.. There were certain long walks to be taken, which in those fine midsummer days became a part of her daily duty. She and Captain Curling had become great friends ; and old Mrs. Wattles, the captain's housekeeper, had on several occasions made her appearance at the cottage, accompanied by Jane, the captain's

housemaid and parlour-maid, with the captain's compliments, and would Mrs. Campbell allow Miss Bertha to come up to tea at Woodbine Cottage, and Jane should remain to attend Mrs. Campbell meantime? And then there were moonlight walks home—the greenest memories of many an after year—performed, according to the strict orders of Mrs. Wattles, under the discreet chaperonage of the captain, who used upon every such occasion to grumble that it was very odd the junior officer could not take the watch on deck without having the captain out of his cabin.

At last, towards the end of July, things at the Castle seemed to be in a position which might permit Lancaster to absent himself for a few days, and pay a flying visit to Sillchester, as he had for some time past been wishing to do. He was anxious for two or three reasons to have a little talk with his good friends the Henningtrees—with both of them—with the wife as well as with the husband. There were some questions respecting the work at the Castle on which he wished to have the advantage of his old master's taste and experience. And there were some other matters, on which he felt a

longing desire to speak with Mrs. Henningtree. Not that there was any topic on which he could have to say to her aught that he would have wished her not to repeat to her husband. But Mrs. Henningtree had always been very fond of him; they had been great friends, and there are matters on which a man is apt to feel that he can speak to such a friend as Miriam Henningtree, but which he could not discuss with any friend of his own sex, however near and dear.

In the meantime, during the past month, he had not been so much with Fraser as he would fain have been. For the longer his mind dwelt on all the circumstances which had led him to form that opinion of the probability of Fraser's real parentage, which he had endeavoured to make the young American share, the more convinced he became that he had hit upon the real truth. He could not banish the subject from his thoughts. Possibly the fact that the upshot of his inferences and guesses, if they turned out to be correct, would be to place Mary Artingale within his reach, may have had a larger part in thus forcing his mind to dwell upon the subject than he would have wished, or would have

admitted to himself. But the fact was that he was always brooding on it, and would have been fain to talk of it constantly with Fraser. But George cared little about the matter in comparison with certain other thoughts of which his mind and heart were full. And he had less time to give his friend than previously. For the same circumstances which had led to Bertha's diminished industry as to her drawings, had given occupation to much of George's time. Once, too, during this period the latter had been obliged to go to London for a few days on business connected with the affair which caused his stay in England. Nevertheless, he and Lancaster had had three or four long rambles together, during which he had endeavoured to stir up Fraser's interest in the matter to the level of his own—very unsuccessfully. Some talk had also passed between the young men on these occasions on the subject of Lancaster's half-avowed passion for Mary Artingale. And on this topic the feelings and ideas of the two men differed. It was Fraser's notion, as might naturally have been expected, that Lancaster should "go in and win if he could;" that if he could win Mary's love, no consideration what-

ever of the disparity of her condition and his condition, or of the wishes, plans, or ambitions of her parents ought to stand in his way for the moment. But he thought, on the other hand, that Lancaster's position with respect to the family at the Castle, as well as his love for Miss Artingale, ought to prevent him at all events from being the man to lend a hand towards the possible ruin of the family. Lancaster could agree with him on neither point.

It was a beautiful July morning on which he got on the box of the "Hero" to make his journey to Sillchester. He had arranged to be absent four days, the Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. He would then have two clear days at Sillchester, the journey thither taking one day, and the return another. There was no night coach, or he would have availed himself of that means of prolonging his stay with his friends. He had written to tell them of his coming, and hoped to be with them in time for a supper-dinner on the Friday.

He had an object in view, too, which would occupy several hours of the Saturday morning. He had heard Miss Agnes express some time previously the pleasure it would give her to

possess a drawing of the Moat House at Sillchester, the residence of her girlhood, as will perhaps be remembered. She had asked Lancaster whether he knew of the existence of any published plate of the old house and gardens. He had never seen or heard of anything of the kind. And he was now bent on making such a drawing, and taking it back with him to Artingale as a present to Miss Agnes. He rather grudged the expenditure of so many hours as the work would require out of his little holiday. But he had imagined a scheme which would lessen this evil. He would ask Mrs. Henningtree to come with him, and sit beside him while he made his drawing. He thought that no better opportunity than that could be found for such a conversation as he wished to have with his old friend. He would have, too, to have recourse to the Henningtrees for the obtaining of the necessary permission to make the drawing he wished. For the Moat House had long since passed into other hands—people who were, he knew, clients and friends of Mr. Henningtree. The new owner of the Moat House was a wine merchant; but one who bore a name of territorial standing in Sillshire, a man of large culture, and much

respected and liked by all the county. Not that this gentleman has anything to do with my story. But the Moat House belonged to him when I first knew it, and I remember him well.

The spot from which Lancaster proposed to make his drawing was a certain quiet corner of the large garden ; from which a side view of the magnificent terrace under the old city wall—the terrace on which, as I hope the reader may remember, Agnes Artingale at eighteen made that sacrifice of her love to the exacting spirit of the Artingale name which had made her life a loveless and a desolate one—might be combined with a direct view of the house, and of the towers of the cathedral, and the trees in the close behind it. And in this quiet corner Lancaster thought that, while he plied his pencil, he might say to and hear from his trusted friend all that he wished to say and hear.

It was past seven when the “Hero” drove up to the “London Inn” in the High Street of Sillchester ; and what with the delay of unloading the heavily laden coach, and the time occupied by boots in trundling his barrow with Lancaster’s portmanteau over the Sillchester pavements, it was nearly eight before he reached Mr. Henning-

tree's house in the close. There the warmest of welcomes awaited him, and a fatted calf had been killed, in the semblance of a leg of south-down mutton, which, like the celebrated haunch, deserved to be painted, a currant tart, and a little vase of some yellow-looking substance, which a cockney would have taken for melted butter suffered to become cold, but which all Sillshire, men, women, and children, knew to be clotted cream. Then there was Miriam's dainty and beautiful tea-service of old Worcester ware, with the silver teakettle, and its attendant lamp—for in that house an urn was held to be a new-fangled and detestable invention—on a side table.

“Miriam has made the arrival of the ‘Hero’ an hour or so later than the usual dinner-time into an excuse for turning dinner into tea, and robbing you and me of our bottle of the old port, Purcell. But there are a few bottles left, and we will have one to-morrow,” said Henningtree.

“He shall have one to-night, if he likes it better than tea,” said Miriam; “but I thought that he would prefer a dish of tea after his journey.”

The phrase “cup” of tea, had not yet crept up from the servants' hall to the drawing-room in those days.

“And so I do, my dear Mrs. Henningtree. I am thirsty, and my throat is full of dust, and under those circumstances there is nothing like a dish of tea; and it is an artistic as well as a material pleasure to drink it out of that charming ware.”

“Well, let it be tea *decedente die*. But it shall be port to-morrow,” said Henningtree. “I hear grand things of your doings at Artingale, Mr. Purcell,” he added, as they sat down to their meal; “I shall be jealous if you don’t take care. I hear all about it.”

“I suppose Sillchester Cathedral then will begin to be jealous of Artingale Castle?” laughed Lancaster; “but of course I know that you hear all about it, for I have told you all in my own letters.”

“Pooh, pooh, not half! I have better means of information than that. Mr. Farland writes to me every now and then. In all sober seriousness, you seem to have been doing great things.”

“Little of that, I am afraid, sir.”

“At all events you have succeeded in highly pleasing your employers, for I suppose I may include Farland in the term.”

“I am sure I am very glad to hear it.”

“And it is not always that one can do that, and have one’s own way, and make one’s own plans override those of one’s employers, at the same time.”

“I suppose not, sir. But you don’t mean to credit me with such a miraculous performance?” said Lancaster, slightly blushing.

“Yes, but I do though. I know all about it, you see—a great deal more than your letters have told me. What about the great south gallery, eh? which Sir Hildebrand firmly believes at this day to be the creation of his own brain. Do you think Farland was the dupe of all that story? Not he! he knew his old friend better, and gives the credit where the credit is due. It was a splendid idea, and I congratulate you upon it with all my heart. It would never have occurred to me.”

“Oh, my dear sir, I am sure it would, when you came to study the localities on the spot. It was a very obvious improvement.”

“It will be the main feature of the restored Castle; and a very magnificent feature too—really a masterly idea, my dear boy, without any flattery.”

“I am so glad you really think it good. We are getting on with the work at a very good rate, and really it promises very well.”

“I must find time for a run over to Billiford, and have a look at it.”

“Oh, how I wish you would, sir! It would be everything for us all. There are two or three points on which I wanted to ask your advice, but you could give it so much better on the spot.”

“I wish he would do it. A holiday and a bit of a run always does him good. And then he might have you all to himself, Purcell, and talk architecture and bricks and mortar from morning till night. But I protest against your doing so here. There are so many other things I want to ask him about.”

“And I am ready to answer, ma’am. What shall we begin with?” said Lancaster, laughing.

“Oh, with yourself in the first place, of course. How do you get on at the cottage?” said Mrs. Henningtree.

“Oh, famously; nothing could be better. Little Bertha is the phoenix of neat-handed Phillises, and takes the best possible care of me.”

“And you have not been captivated by the pretty bright face and soft intelligent eyes that belong to the neat hands, eh, sir? You can report yourself still heart-whole, eh?” said the brisk little woman.

“I confess that I thought your scheme of the joint work on the Castle rather suspicious,” said Mr. Henningtree; “but, putting aside the sex of the proposed *collaboratrice*, the scheme is a good scheme, and the drawings you sent me are capital. She must be a very clever little body, your neat-handed Phillis.”

“She is a very clever little body, *very* clever! but I assure you our *collaboration* has been carried on in the most purely business-like manner. Had I been ever so much inclined for flirtation, there would have been no chance for me. Little Bertha has been wooed and won since you were at Billiford, ma’am,” said Lancaster.

“You don’t say so? And who is the happy man—for I really think he is likely to have a very nice little wife?” said Mrs. Henningtree, with all a woman’s unfailing curiosity on such subjects.

“Do you remember a young American, a

mate in a merchant ship, who dined at Farlandstoke the last day of your visit there, a Mr. Fraser?" asked Lancaster.

"A very tall, bright-looking, handsome young man? Yes, to be sure," said the lady.

"Well, that is the man. I have seen a good deal of him since I have been at Artingale, and I think little Miss Bertha will have a very good husband. He is very much valued and respected, I understand, by his employers; and from what I have seen of him, I should say that he is a thoroughly good fellow," said Lancaster, heartily.

"I am very glad of it for that little girl's sake. She interested me that morning at Farlandstoke, when she brought up her drawing, and was frightened out of her wits, poor little thing," said Mr. Henningtree.

"But how about her future?" said Mrs. Henningtree; "your young friend will of course take his wife home with him to America? Well, perhaps that will be all for the best, for the poor little artist's position here is not a favourable one."

"She would have to leave her old grandmother, which would be a source of difficulty

and trouble ; but no doubt the old woman would be properly cared for," said Lancaster, thoughtfully.

His mind was busy with the question whether indeed George Fraser would have to take his wife to America ; whether it might not come to pass that little Bertha would be called on to remain at Artingale, in a somewhat more favourable position than that which struck Mrs. Henningtree as so unfavourable. And Lancaster, as he thought of these things, was endeavouring to make up his mind as to the expediency, or the reverse, of confiding his speculations and thoughts on this subject to his friends, and obtaining their opinion and counsel. It was the most natural course for him to take. But a sort of dread of being laughed at and deemed visionary and absurd, of being pooh-pooh'd, in short, and recommended to put any such notion out of his thoughts—a recommendation which he was conscious that he could not comply with, made him hesitate. He had debated this matter much with himself as he sat on the box of the "Hero" on his road to Sillchester, and had pretty well come to the determination to say what he had to say on the subject to Mrs. Henningtree, in

the course of the conversation which he had planned to have with her in the garden of the Moat House. But now it seemed that the present was a good opportunity, and it came into his head, moreover, that, if it should come to pass that he should be led into making any confession to Mrs. Henningtree of his love for Mary Artingale—and he had in fact almost made up his mind to make a clean breast to her on this subject—then he would prefer that his ideas respecting the possibility of the baronet's ejection from his present position should come to his friend's mind separately from his confidences on that other subject.

So he plucked up his courage—it seemed to him that the matter in hand required all he could muster—and returned to the subject of old Hannah.

“The old woman,” said he, “is not so great a favourite of mine as her granddaughter.”

“You don't say so,” interrupted Mrs. Henningtree; “that is strange! But I have known similar cases.”

“But what I was going to say,” continued Lancaster, according but a faint smile to his old friend's sally, “was that I have no doubt that

the ladies at Artingale would see that old Hannah was properly cared for, if it should come to pass that Bertha should be called upon to go to America."

"The marriage is not fixed then?" said Mrs. Henningtree.

"Yes; I take it that both Fraser and Bertha consider it to be very immutably fixed. But, perhaps, it does not follow as a certainty that she would have to go to America," said Lancaster.

"How so? He, as I understood, is a mate on board a New England merchant ship; gets his bread in that station of life; has relatives there. How can he do otherwise than take his wife to his own home?" said Miriam.

"Well," said Lancaster, speaking with hesitation and difficulty, "it is possible, that is, there seems to me to be a possibility that Fraser may not return to reside in his old home. And this brings me to a subject on which I have been very anxious to consult with you, my dear and best friends, and to ask your best advice—a subject which has occupied much of my mind lately."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Henningtree, surprised by the seriousness of the young man's

manner, and exchanging glances with his wife, "depend upon it, the best counsel we can give shall be yours. What is it you have on your mind, Purcell?"

"Nothing in any way personal to me, sir," said Lancaster, his inmost conscience giving him a twinge, and causing him to blush as he spoke the words, "nothing that is properly my business at all, but a serious matter enough. Did it by any chance occur to you, sir, or to you, my dear Mrs. Henningtree," continued Lancaster, after a pause during which he was considering how he should best enter on his subject—"did it occur to either of you when you were at Farlandstoke, to remark a singular likeness between that young man, George Fraser, and anybody you know?"

"To be sure it did. We both remarked," answered Mrs. Henningtree, eagerly, "the curious likeness between him and Sir Hildebrand."

"Ay! and between him and all the Artingale family," returned Lancaster. "It is most singular and most striking. I made a little sketch of his head and of that of the statue of one of the old Artingales in the Artingale chapel annexed

to the parish church, and it is quite wonderful how the likeness came out. I put the two heads into the hand of Miss Donne—Bertha, you know,—an artist with an artist's eye—and she was struck by it directly. Mr. Henningtree, I believe George Fraser to be an Artingale!”

“It is by no means improbable,” said that gentleman, quietly; “family likenesses are not confined by nature to the legitimate branches of a family, as a herald might perhaps think they ought to be. And the branches of a family which the heralds do not recognize are more likely to be spread broadcast over the world than those which have an interest in the family acres.”

“Very true, sir,” said Lancaster; “but now let me lay before you certain circumstances as shortly and concisely as I can.”

And then Lancaster proceeded with great perspicuity to explain the chain of facts and inferences which had led him to form the opinion that in all probability the young American mate was the real heir to the title and estates of Artingale. If he could have known the facts which had fallen into the possession of Mr. Jonas Hathaway, it will be seen that his probabilities would have advanced a long way towards be-

coming certainties. And if Mr. Jonas had only known the facts which Fraser had communicated to Lancaster, his case would have appeared to him nearly a certain one. But it had so chanced that they had each got one half only of the evidence.

Nevertheless the circumstances which Lancaster was able to lay before his friends were in themselves strong enough to make a very strong impression upon them both.

“Serious enough,” cried Mr. Henningtree; “but, in the first place, my dear boy, we must take care not to let our imagination, impressed with the singularity of the circumstances before us, run away with us. In order to produce the very startling consequences which you contemplate, several facts must be proved, of which we have as yet no proof. It may be that the late Sir George Artingale may have been the man who shipped off to the colonies the woman of whom this George Fraser speaks as his grandmother, and yet he may be no legitimate representative of the late baronet. There may have been no marriage. The old woman now living in America may be in error on this point. It is extremely probable that she should be so. There may even have been a marriage, and George

Fraser may be the son—not of a legitimate *son* of the late baronet, but of a legitimate *daughter*. And in that case, you know, though it would be shown that Sir Hildebrand is not the heir, it would not be true that Fraser is.”

“True, sir; and I had thought of that. But the fact is that the old lady in America is Fraser’s grandmother on the father’s side. His father was the son of the woman who declares that she was married in England to a gentleman of rank, who sent her out of the country, in order that he might be free to marry another woman. Was the late baronet guilty of any such crime? That is the question. The wonderful likeness of Fraser to the Artingale family, joined to the story told by his grandmother, first put the notion into my head. But I have now something more than that to go upon. Sir George was not an unlikely man to commit such an infamy, from all that one has heard of him. And then there is the remarkable conduct of the old servant, my landlady at the cottage, when she was questioned about the possibility of such an event having happened, and the curious fact that Mr. Jonas Hathaway, the attorney, should have been making such inquiries. Does not all this make

a strong case, sir?" said Lancaster, looking eagerly at Mr. Henningtree.

"It does unquestionably, taken altogether, form a ground for a strong suspicion of the kind," said Mr. Henningtree; "but I should be more inclined to think that, supposing our suspicions of Sir George Artingale having had anything to do with this Mr. Fraser's grandmother to be correct, the poor woman had been deceived in the matter of the marriage rather than that, having been duly married, she should have been persuaded to allow herself to be got rid of in the manner suggested. The one fraud, it may be feared, is by no means an unprecedented one, and would not have exposed the perpetrator of it to any such terrible consequences as would have been likely enough to result from the other. Bigamy is a serious matter; and the permanent consequences of causing an illegitimate child to pass for the heir to such a property and position as that of Artingale are such as must, one would think, insure detection at some time or other."

"All that is true, sir," said Lancaster; "and it has all passed through my mind again and again. It may be that Fraser's grandmother

was mistaken in supposing herself legally married. Still it seems to me that this Hannah Campbell has the consciousness on her mind of having something to conceal. Then again, as to the calculations of a man minded to perpetrate such a crime, it would no doubt appear to him that he had safely provided against all possibility of proof of the marriage. And it is likely enough that it may turn out that he did so successfully. I do not see any way to obtaining proof of it, if indeed it were a real marriage. But I cannot help thinking that the probabilities are in favour of its having been such. What could this Hannah Campbell have had to do with any scheme of simply pensioning off a mistress? yet that she had something to do with this matter I am very strongly persuaded. Why, again, should it have been necessary, if that were all that were to be done, to resort to such a measure as sending the woman to America? No. I cannot help believing that George Fraser's grandmother was really and truly Lady Artingale."

There was a silence of some minutes while the thoughts of all three of the persons present were busied with the attempt to weigh the

probabilities of the question. Mrs. Henningtree was the first to speak.

"I am inclined on the whole to agree with Purcell," she said. "I do think that there is strong ground for suspecting that it may have been as he thinks. But the more important question is, what then? What should, or could, or ought to be done by him in the matter? Ought anything to be done?"

"That is mainly the point on which I wished to ask for counsel," said Lancaster. "What does it behove me to do, knowing what I know, and believing what I believe?"

"You have spoken with Mr. Fraser on the subject?" said Mr. Henningtree; "you have, I suppose, expressed your opinion to him, and given the ground of your suspicions?"

"Yes, sir, fully and frequently," replied Lancaster.

"And what view does he take of the matter?" asked Mr. Henningtree.

"He thinks very little of it. His head has been full of his love-making. His own feeling would be to let the matter rest."

"Humph!" said Mr. Henningtree. "That looks to me very much as if he was conscious of

having painted to you the wrong suffered by his grandmother at the hands of the English aristocrat rather too strongly. It strikes me that he does not feel any very strong conviction that the old lady was ever really married. At all events it is clear to me, that having mentioned to this Fraser the idea which occurred to your mind, you have done all that the severest love of right and justice can prompt. There can be no reason why you should attempt to move in the matter. Of course it would be a very great grief to everybody if such a calamity were to fall upon the excellent family at the Castle—a terrible grief and immense misfortune. But right is right, I know. I know what may be said on that head. And it seems to me that you have done all that the strongest feeling on that subject can dictate. My opinion is, that you should do no more. I would let the matter rest.”

“And I am entirely disposed to be guided by your opinion upon the subject, my dear sir. I will neither say nor do, nor, as far as I can, think any further on the subject. And I am tolerably sure that Fraser, if nobody else moves in the matter, will think nothing more of it.

He never would believe that there was anything in it, and appeared to entertain the subject unwillingly."

And Lancaster was, as he said, fully purposed not to give the matter, which had recently occupied his mind so much, another thought. He had again and again assured himself that not for the world would he be influenced in any step that he might take in connection with the subject by the thought that thus he might be diminishing the impassable distance that separated him from Mary Artingale. He had declared again and again to his own heart that it would be baseness unparalleled to be moved by any consideration to lend a hand to the pulling of her down from the high station in which she was placed. He perfectly believed that he had never been influenced by any such consideration, and that he was incapable of being led to act by any such. But it would be too much, probably, to assert that he now abandoned all prospect of such a possibility without an inward pang. Nevertheless he was truly and perfectly sincere, both in his professions to his own heart and in his expressed determination to be guided by the opinion his friend had now given him.

And the trio separated for the night, agreeing with each other that nothing further should be said, either among themselves or to any one else, of the singular circumstances which seemed to all of them calculated to give rise to such uncomfortable suspicions.

They did not, however, part till Lancaster had obtained a promise from Mrs. Henningtree that she would accompany him to the garden of the Moat House after breakfast on the morrow, and would undertake to get for him the permission needed for making the drawing he purposed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GARDEN OF THE MOAT HOUSE.

THE next morning found Mrs. Henningtree and Lancaster seated side by side in the quiet corner of the Moat House garden, from which he had planned to take his drawing. Mr. Henningtree had rather grumbled at their arrangement, for he was anxious to take Lancaster with him to the cathedral, and would have liked a long morning spent in going over every part of the recent works, and talking over the restorations which yet remained to be executed. But Lancaster held firm to his scheme. He would not give up either the drawing for Miss Agnes or the *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Henningtree, which was to be an accompaniment to the making of it. His only other day at Sillchester was the Sunday, and that was not available for

the purpose. So a compromise was made, on the understanding that Purcell should be up in time to have a couple of hours in the cathedral with Mr. Henningtree before breakfast.

This engagement had been duly kept; breakfast had been eaten at half-past eight; and the cathedral bells were going for the ten o'clock morning service in the choir, when Mrs. Henningtree and Lancaster, with all needful apparatus of camp-stools, sketch-books, and colour-boxes, entered the garden of the Moat House. It was a lovely morning, and specially well adapted for the purpose in hand; for though the sun was shining brightly the sky was not free from scattered clouds, which were drifting slowly across the wide summer-blue expanse, and producing a thousand of those varied effects of light and shade so dear to an artist's eye.

Mrs. Henningtree had also brought her sketch-book and pencils. She said that since she was to sit there while a drawing was being made, she might as well avail herself of the time and opportunity to make a drawing for herself also. So they sat themselves down to their work, side by side, as has been said.

The subject before them was a singularly

beautiful one, exquisitely home-like in its suggestions of calmness, security, and repose. On the left of the foreground, almost in profile, was the long-stretching terrace on the top of its high flowery bank, and its protecting back of old city wall, itself an exhaustless study of colour in all its mottled richness of tints, the varied hues of time-worn, weather-beaten stone, and every sort of stone-loving parasitical vegetation. To the right of the foreground was a single magnificent Spanish chestnut of a size rarely seen in England, which had for many a lustre turned to the best advantage the sheltered position, the rich garden soil, and the warm, moist Sillshire atmosphere. In the middle distance, a little to the left, was the house with its picturesque-pointed gables and ornamented chimneys; and in the distance, seen between the chestnut tree and the house, were the noble trees of the close and the grey towers of the cathedral. There was a group of fine elms behind them, the home of a happy colony of rooks, whose national archives reached back to a great antiquity, and must undoubtedly have contained records of very interesting cawings, cawed at the time the siege of Sillchester by the Parliament troops

was going on beneath them. Some important business was under discussion by the conscript fathers of the tribe when Mrs. Henningtree and Lancaster pitched their camp-stools beneath their home, and the voices of the senators mingled very pleasantly with the chiming of the cathedral bells.

"Now then, Purcell," said Mrs. Henningtree, as soon as they had settled themselves with their sketch-books on their knees, "I am ready to hear your confession."

"Confession, Mrs. Henningtree? Who said anything about confession? Why should you imagine that I have any confession to make?" said Lancaster, looking up sharply from the pencil he was cutting, as he spoke.

"Oh, no. You said nothing about confession. But of course I know that is what I have been brought to this very pretty confessional to hear. You are going to confess to me that you have fallen in love. I do not know that I shall grant you absolution. That depends," said the little lady, holding up the point of her pencil between her eye and the light.

"I am sure I can't guess why you should have taken such a notion into your head," said

Purcell, a little annoyed. He had not altogether made up his mind that he was going to confess to his old friend his unhappy passion for Miss Artingale. He had thought that he would see how the conversation went ;—if he had a good opportunity he would speak to her. It would certainly be a great comfort—a very great comfort—to be able to speak upon the subject to sympathising ears. Had he any lurking, unavowed hope that his kind friend—a poor man's portionless daughter—would bid him defy all social *convenances* and considerations drawn from what the world might say, or think, or expect, and advise him to win his love if he could win her? Possibly there may have been some such lingering and altogether unavowed hope at the very bottom of his heart. There often are hopes in the deep bottom of our hearts, the existence of which we do not admit even to ourselves in our most secret self-communings. And if such counsel were given to him—what then? Had he any kind of feeling which whispered in his ear that, if he were minded so to try, the winning might not be impossible to him? Possibly—more possibly, I think, than in the other case—he would not have despaired on this point, if only

duty and inclination could be shown to be not diametrically opposed as to that other point.

“I am sure,” said he, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, “I do not know why you should assume that I have anything of the sort to confess.”

“Make your observations, and draw your conclusions and your inferences, if you please, sir, with respect to subjects of your own sex, and then perhaps you will be less liable to error. How can you tell what a woman knows, or can see, or can guess? What do you understand of our means of observation and perception? Just nothing at all. We see much when you men see nothing at all. We draw conclusions with unerring certainty where you cannot perceive the existence of any data at all. I tell you that you have brought me to this pretty, quiet spot to hear, and sympathise, if I can, with some love tale. A prettier or better adapted place for the purpose could not be selected. So now, my penitent, get on with your confession. I am all ear, and the sympathy service all turned on in readiness,” said Miriam.

“One would not say so, if one had need of sympathy, to judge by your tone,” said Lancaster.

But he knew his old friend and her ways well; and had not the smallest misgiving as to receiving from her attention, sympathy, kindness, and counsel at his need.

"Never mind my tone, Purcell. You know all my tones pretty well by this time, I should think," said the lady, screwing up one eye, as she measured the spaces in her sketch by her upheld pencil.

"And if there were confession to be made," rejoined Purcell, "you do not give me any great encouragement by warning me that my obtaining absolution is doubtful."

"Well, yes. No reasonable confessor would undertake to give plenary absolution without the least knowledge what the sins to be forgiven might have been. Suppose, now, you are going to tell me, for instance, that you have fallen desperately in love with that sharp-looking, black-eyed girl, the daughter of the doctor, who dined at Farlandstoke the last time I was there—Miss Hathaway, I think they called her—absolution, I fear, could hardly be given till very sincere penitence had wiped away the sin."

"But, indeed, I have not fallen in love with Miss Hathaway, Mrs. Henningtree, despite the

black eyes," said Lancaster, still willing to put off for an instant the real work of confession.

"I hope it is not little Bertha, or 'we shall have cutting of throats," said Mrs. Henningtree, drawing away assiduously.

"No ; you warned me of that danger before I was exposed to it, you know. It struck you as one that I was likely to fall into. But there were other dangers against which you gave me no warning—doubtless because it never occurred to you to dream of them as dangerous to me. Pshaw ! I must begin my sketch over again ; I have spoilt this one. I don't know what has come to my hand," cried Lancaster, irritably, tearing across the drawing he had begun.

"I am afraid, my dear Purcell, it is not your *hand* that anything has come to. Come, I don't think that confessing and sketching go well together. Let us get the harder work off our minds first, and then we will set to work at the easier task," said the lady, closing her own sketch-book, and turning more directly towards him. "Now then," she went on, "what was the danger against which I omitted to warn you, Purcell ?"

"It was one, my kind friend, against which

it never could have come into your head to warn me, because you never could have imagined me presumptuous blockhead enough to have fallen into it," said Lancaster, bitterly.

"What! not—ah, Purcell, I guess it now. It is Mary Artingale," said Mrs. Henningtree, looking into his face with no shade of irony or merriment in the expression of her own.

"You never warned me that to come within the glance of her eye, the sound of her voice, was to love her. You never told me to shun the sight of her as I would shun perdition," said Lancaster, in a voice little above a whisper, with eyes cast down on the turf at his feet, and a burning blush on cheek and brow.

Mrs. Henningtree put out her little hand and took his, and held it with a firm pressure, saying no word for a little while. Then she said, very gently—

"Alas! my poor boy. And she——?" she added, hesitatingly, and as if afraid of her own question, after another short pause.

"How—she? What of her? What do you mean to ask, Mrs. Henningtree?" said Lancaster, looking up at her with his face still on fire.

"I mean—I meant to ask—has she—does she

return your love?" said Mrs. Henningtree, apparently almost as much embarrassed as Lancaster himself.

"Return my love! Return—Mrs. Henningtree, what are you imagining? What are you dreaming of? You do not suppose—you would not suspect me of having—My dear Mrs. Henningtree, no word, no slightest word, has passed between me and Miss Artingale that could lead her to guess what I felt towards her."

"My poor, dear boy! I might have known, Purcell, that, let your feelings have been what they may, your conduct would be dictated by the very soul of honour," said Mrs. Henningtree, stretching out her hand a second time, and grasping his warmly as she spoke.

"No," continued Lancaster, speaking hoarsely, for his throat felt parched; "I was not going to give Sir Hildebrand cause to say that Mr. Henningtree had sent a traitor into his house to rob him of his daughter. I do not mean to say," he added, quickly, "pray understand, Mrs. Henningtree, that I do not mean to say—I do not for a moment imagine that I could have succeeded in making myself guilty of such a treason, if I had been base enough to have attempted it.

Miss Artingale would doubtless have known how to treat any tentative of the sort as it would have merited. But, for the sake of my own character in your eyes, and those of Mr. Henningtree, I say, and can say with the utmost truth, that, let my folly have been what it may, it has done no evil save to work my own misery. I have never by word or look sought to lead Miss Artingale to divine what I felt for her. Never, never."

"My poor, dear, honourable boy," said Mrs. Henningtree, and the tears stood in her bright, dark eyes as she said the words.

"And it was hard, very hard, to be resolute—to keep guard on tongue and eye always, always," continued Lancaster, who, now that his secret was told, felt an infinite comfort in pouring the tale of his woes into the sympathising ears of the clever, bright, kind, and friendly little woman at his side. "It was very difficult. We were constantly together, every day and almost every evening. Not, as you will believe, by my seeking, not by my will."

"By hers then?" asked Mrs. Henningtree, with a slight accentuation of censure in her tone.

"By the will of the family generally. There

were drawing-lessons daily. Miss Artingale has very considerable artistic taste. She asked me to look at her drawings—to help her. Could I refuse? They are all fond of music. She and her aunt, Miss Agnes, both sing. They wished me to sing with them. We passed the evenings in singing together more frequently than not. Could I refuse their invitations?”

“I think the imprudence has been on their side. Surely Miss Agnes at least ought to have known the danger of what she was doing,” said Mrs. Henningtree.

“Doubtless they imagined that the distance between Miss Artingale and the poor hired architect was as efficient a protection to one party as it was to the other,” said Lancaster, with somewhat of bitterness in his tone. “But they meant to be kind, they acted in pure hospitality and kindness,” he added, in a different accent; “and nobody has been to blame, nobody has been foolish but I. Mine has been the fault, and mine the suffering. But oh, my dear friend, if you knew her, you would less wonder at my weakness. Her beauty, heavenly as it is, is the smallest part of the unspeakable charm that belongs to her. How was it possible

to be with her as I have been, and fail to worship her?"

"Poor boy, poor boy," murmured Mrs. Henningtree, shaking her head sadly, and shedding, as she did so, the tears which filled her eyes on to the sketch-book in her hand.

They both sat in perfect silence, for several minutes. At the end of them Mrs. Henningtree, looking sideways at her companion from under her eyelashes, said, very slowly—

"Purcell, if your guess respecting that young Mr. Fraser were correct, and if you had pushed it to its results, there would have been no such distance between you and Mary Artingale."

"Ah, my friend, my friend, if you are my friend, do not speak of that," said Lancaster, holding up his opened palm with its face towards her, and turning away his face. "If you could but know," he continued, "how I have striven by day and by night to keep that thought out of my mind. But now, thank heaven, I have the strengthening of Mr. Henningtree's advice and your own upon that subject—your advice impartially given. My line of duty has been made clear to me. By God's help I will follow it. What, shall I show my love to her whom I

love—oh, how much better than myself!—by pulling her down to my level, by bringing ruin upon all she loves? Shall I do this, consciously led to do so by no overriding sense of duty, but avowedly for the sake of pulling her down till she is within my reach—to be probably and most deservedly rewarded by failing in my attempt to seize the prize of such villainy? Shall I be guilty of such atrocious selfishness, and call it *love*? No, my friend, it is not so that I have loved Mary Artingale.”

Again there was a long pause. Lancaster, his sketch-book having fallen on the turf at his feet, sat with his face covered with his hands. Mrs. Henningtree seemed to be absorbed in thought. At last she said—

“Purcell, my dear boy, tell me honestly—honestly,” said Mrs. Henningtree, checking herself; “I know you can say nothing that is not the very soul of honesty—but it is a question on which men are apt to find it difficult to speak the absolute truth to their own secret hearts; tell me whether you have any—the slightest—suspicion that Mary Artingale has any regard for you?”

“Regard! Beyond the kindness, which is of

the very essence of her nature, and which I doubt not was shown to me all the more markedly because of the inferiority of my social position, I have no reason whatsoever to think that she cares for me more than for any other of those around her," said Lancaster, appearing to speak, as indeed he was speaking, the very truth that was in him, as far as he knew it.

"Not more, for instance, than for Mr. Felix Farland?" said Mrs. Henningtree, not very wisely, perhaps, in the interest of the man to whom she was speaking, and for whose welfare she was so truly anxious—and rather following out aloud the current of her own thoughts than thinking of influencing his.

"Mr. Felix Farland is, as report says, the man to whom she is to be married; and the marriage is, I believe, considered by every one to be an eminently well-assorted one. I trust to heaven that Miss Artingale regards him very far otherwise than she can ever have thought of me," said Lancaster, earnestly.

"It is the wish of one who really loves her better than he loves himself—if such a marriage is to be. Well assorted? Does it seem to you, Purcell, to be a well-assorted marriage?"

Put yourself out of a lover's, and into a father's place. If you had such a daughter as Mary Artingale, would you think that you were doing well for her in giving her to such a one as good, honest, kind-natured Felix Farland?" asked Mrs. Henningtree.

"It seems to me that I have hardly a right to ask myself such questions—or at least that it is not wise to ask them. This at least I am thoroughly well persuaded of, that Miss Artingale will not marry any man whom she does not love."

"So I am inclined to think," said Mrs. Henningtree, and then there was another long pause.

"I suppose," resumed Mrs. Henningtree, "that you do not wish that what you have told me should be kept a secret from my husband. I have no secrets from him. And you know how sincerely he loves you, Purcell."

"No," said Lancaster, sadly; "I wish that he should know what I have said to you. I should like him to know that I have striven hard to do my duty, and to merit the confidence he placed in me when he sent me to Artingale."

"You *have* done your duty uprightly, honestly,

nobly, Purcell; and Henningtree will feel it no less strongly than I do. He will know how to appreciate your self-sacrifice worthily, depend upon it. But, Purcell, will you return to Artingale?" asked Mrs. Henningtree, with a deeply pitying look in her sad eyes.

"Yes, Mrs. Henningtree, I shall return on Monday to Artingale. I shall, I trust, complete my task there. How can I do otherwise? On what avowed ground can I desert it? Shall I say that I am so stricken with love for my employer's daughter, that my own peace of mind requires me to leave her neighbourhood. No, I will finish my task. And do not fear, dear, kind Mrs. Henningtree, that I shall fail in the line of conduct I have prescribed for myself. Do not imagine that I shall be led into saying or doing by word or look aught that you or Mr. Henningtree could disapprove," said Lancaster, sadly.

"It is a martyrdom for you, my poor boy, a long martyrdom," said Mrs. Henningtree, looking at him affectionately.

"It is the punishment of my folly and presumption, and, please heaven, I will bear it to the end. Yes, Mrs. Henningtree, I shall return

to Artingale on the day after to-morrow," he said.

"Can you attempt to make this drawing?" she said, looking at the closed sketch-book in her hand; "if you can, your purposes are steadier than mine. I can do no more drawing to-day."

"I am afraid I must give it up," said Lancaster; "I am ashamed of myself for saying so, but I should only spoil it. I must do it for Miss Agnes at some future time. Shall we return home?"

"Yes, let us go. I want to see Henningtree, and talk to him. Go you and take a stroll by yourself, my dear boy, and try to compose your mind," said his friend.

"Do not let Mr. Henningtree speak to me of this folly," said Lancaster; "I am too much ashamed of it. I am glad that I found courage to confess myself to you," he added, with a faint smile, "glad too that he should know what you will tell him; but I shrink from talking of it even with one so kind as he is."

So Lancaster walked with Mrs. Henningtree to the door of her home in the close, and parting with her there, went off for a stroll by himself up to a celebrated point of view above the city

to the north-east, from which the eye ranges over the magnificent woods of Lindisfarn Chase in one direction, and over the city and the valley of the Sill, extending and widening away towards Sillmouth, in the other direction.

Mrs. Henningtree found her husband at home, and, making him come with her to her own little sanctum, told him all that Lancaster had confessed to her, not without an abundant comment of admiration for the manner in which he had behaved.

"Yes, and he will do so to the end. I have no fear of him. But I think, as he says, that he must go back to Artingale. It would be most disadvantageous to him in every way to abandon his work in the middle. And completed, as he will complete it, it will go far towards making him a professional reputation. And he will get over it, Miriam. Yes, poor fellow, it is bitter enough just now, no doubt. But hard work is the best cure for such sores—especially successful work. He will get over it."

"As you would have got over it, Cyril, if a certain silly little woman had taken it into her head to say 'no' instead of 'yes,' I suppose," said Miriam, looking into his eyes.

“Yes, as I suppose I should have got over it, Miriam—but not quite as he will. It is a malady that, like some others, is apt to be less dangerous in early youth than at a more advanced time of life. He will recover to love again. I should have recovered, but not, I think, to love elsewhere. For all that I am sorry for him with all my heart, poor fellow.”

“And he *has* behaved well, Cyril, has he not?” said his wife, looking up at him as he stood up to go back to his study.

“Indeed he has. I don’t know what would have happened, upon my word, if he had behaved less well, and made love to the heiress of all the Artingale acres, and all the Artingale family pride.”

“Perhaps Mary Artingale is not the heiress to the latter,” said Mrs. Henningtree. “I’ll tell you what, Cyril,” she added, as he stood with his hand on the lock of the door, “I shall have the picture that is to hang over that door there. I’d double the wager with all my heart. Mary Artingale will never marry Felix Farland, you mark my words.”

“We shall see. But we may be satisfied if only she does not run off with our young friend,

or he with her," said Mr. Henningtree, leaving the room as he spoke.

On the following evening, the Sunday, as Mrs. Henningtree was bidding Lancaster good-bye (for the "Hero" was a very matutinal hero, and Lancaster was to leave the house on the Monday morning before the mistress of it would be up), she found an opportunity of saying a few words to him. She told him how cordially Mr. Henningtree had approved of his conduct; how right he thought him in sticking to his task; counselled him to seek his heart-cure from putting it wholly into his work; urged him by all means to seize the earliest opportunity of running over to Silchester for another visit; and so left him with some little ray of comfort in his heart.

CHAPTER IX.

A DRAWING-LESSON.

LANCASTER returned to Artingale with the full feeling that a great and arduous struggle lay before him, and with the strong determination to fight the fight with himself and to be victorious in it. He very fervently and sincerely thanked God that his only wound would be the suffering in this hard battle; that no word, no act, no look of his had done aught to cause Miss Artingale to have any part in the fight, or in the pain of it. Very sincerely he would have believed, could such a fact have been whispered in his ear, that it would have increased his wretchedness tenfold to be told, what the reader of the foregoing pages well knows to be the truth, that Miss Artingale would share to the full in all the pain that was to result from the line of conduct which

he had determined to follow ; that life contemplated without reference to him would seem as blank and desolate to her as did the future to him ; that her drawing would be worthless in her eyes were it not to be shown to him, and crowned by his applause ; that music would have no charm for her ears if he were not to share the charm ; that her every pursuit and occupation was carried on habitually, tacitly, and often hardly consciously, but none the less really, with reference to him. Oh ! twofold misery, to have known that the impassable gulf which separated them must cause as much misery to her as to him. Lancaster, I say, would have been wholly sincere in thus supposing and thus judging himself. But what observer of the human heart does not know, that to have been told all this would have been to him the most exquisite delight that it is possible for a human heart to feel ; that it would have seemed to him that comforted by that knowledge he would have been quite infinitely more able to face the misery of giving her up ?

I do not believe that the heart is always desperately wicked ; but for deceitfulness !

Lancaster was fully persuaded, however,

whether for rejoicing or for the reverse, that none of all this was the case; that no Diana was ever more fancy free (at least as regarded him) than Mary Artingale; and that his alone would be the struggle, and the sorrow, and the pain. The path marked out for him by honour was clear; and tread it he would, firmly and without swerving, though his heart should break in the doing of it. "I could not love thee, dear, so much," he whispered to his aching heart, in the immortal words of our old poet, "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more."

Had there been any faint lurking hope concealing itself at the bottom of his heart when he went to Sillchester, that he might have been exaggerating to himself the evils that would be caused by any attempt on his part to win the heart of Mary Artingale, that the friends, whose kindness and whose judgment he trusted so completely, would, perchance, have taken a different view of the matter, and suggested that "Love should still be lord of all," or any such romantic world theory of similar tenour; that hope—which had never dared to betray its existence by an avowed suggestion—was now

at all events dead. There was no possibility of illusion. Honour absolutely required him so to guard his every word and act, as to render his presence as little capable of producing possible evil to Mary Artingale as that of any one of her father's servants. And this, come what might, he was, by God's assistance, steadfastly purposed to do.

He returned also fully purposed to say no further word anent the suspicions which had been raised in his mind respecting the legitimacy of the present holder of the Artingale title and property. He was fully persuaded that Fraser, if not stirred up on the subject, would never give it another thought. He did not forget that he had had reason to suspect that Jonas Hathaway had been making inquiries of a nature which seemed to indicate that in some way or other he had conceived an idea of the same kind as that which had suggested itself to him. And he took an opportunity very shortly after his return of ascertaining from Bertha that the young attorney had taken no further step, as far as she was aware, in the matter. He had not appeared at the cottage again; and there was in this reason to hope that he, if indeed he were engaged

on the quest Lancaster had imagined, had not been able to see his way to any successful interference with matters at Artingale as they stood at present.

And the fact was indeed that such was much about the case. Dr. Hathaway had, as his son foresaw that he probably would do, made the attempt to ascertain whether any clue to the real facts of the case could be obtained from Lady Lavinia. It was, in the first place, a relief to the Doctor to have any subject on which he could spin out the quantity of chat he was expected to furnish daily in his patient's chamber. Her doctor's visit was Lady Lavinia's sole dissipation; and she looked forward to the daily recurrence of it as to the one interesting point in the four-and-twenty hours. Very small talk on any subject sufficed her, poor lady, as the desired relaxation of her mind, after the important subject of her symptoms for the day had been disposed of. And the doctor found it perfectly easy to lead up to the subject on which he wished her to speak. Nor was she at all averse to talk upon it.

But it was very clear that she had nothing of any moment to tell. Her readiness to talk on

the subject of the late Sir George and his recorded doings, duly reported by the doctor to Mr. Jonas, was of itself to the acute mind of that gentleman strong evidence that there was nothing of what he wanted to hear to be told. Yet it was clear that the Lady Lavinia had heard much gossip about her husband's father. She had heard that he had been a very wicked man, a wild spendthrift, who had brought the property to the verge of ruin. She had heard tales of sad profligacy, at which she hinted with such ambiguities and reticences as the proprieties of the case required, in her talk with the doctor, but evidently no word that could lead to any confirmation of the suspicions which Mr. Jonas had conceived.

And though perhaps these disappointing reports did not induce Mr. Jonas to put the matter entirely out of his mind, they had the effect of so far dulling his hopes, and destroying the scent, as to prevent him from taking any further immediate steps in the matter.

As for George, his mind, as Lancaster had anticipated, was far too full of other things to permit him to give what had appeared to him so completely a cock-and-bull story a moment's

thought. All had been going on to perfection between him and Bertha. For once indeed the course of true love seemed to be running with complete smoothness. He was more in love than ever, and Bertha lived but in the light of his eyes, bridging over the intervals between such moments of real life as best she might, by hybernating periods of paler existence, during which the recollection of that light served to keep her soul alive. But it was a pleasant and a very happy time; so pleasant that Bertha could not find in her heart to regret that it should be prolonged; and even George himself, though he grumbled at the prolongation, could not but admit to himself that he was passing the happiest days of his existence. He grumbled nevertheless at the prolongation of them; but Bertha was firm on this one point. She would not consent to be married till George had duly written to his grandmother, and had received letters from her containing her consent to and approbation of the match. And in those days the postal communication between New and Old England was by no means so rapid as it has since become.

Still, however, the business which detained

Fraser in England did not seem yet to be coming to a conclusion. Delays of the most provoking nature, which nevertheless did not appear to have the effect of provoking him, arose. It was wonderful with what good temper he bore them.

Lancaster threw himself with all his soul—or at least with as much of it as he could call his own—into his work. Still, however, there was the daily drawing-lesson; how could he avoid it? and still on very many days the evening singing party; how could he escape from it? And it was, as he had complained to Mrs. Henningtree, very, very hard to act up to the spirit of his determination.

It soon became, indeed, apparent that he had not the needful skill to do so, without letting Mary perceive a change in his manner. It was a slight one, such as no eyes or ears not sharpened on this point as hers were could probably have detected. But Mary detected it, and was sorely puzzled to understand the meaning of it. Was her master dissatisfied with her progress in her drawing? At all events he seemed to think it necessary to devote the mid-day hour in his studio more exclusively to the

professed object of Mary's visit to it. There was also an increased gravity in the tone of his criticism on her artistic doings, which seemed to mark the dissatisfaction of an unsuccessful teacher. Surely his manner was changed. In the evening too, when they sang together, he seemed to assume an air of being there to do as he was bid ; and appeared altogether constrained and stiff, in a way that she had not been conscious of before. Could his visit to Sillchester be connected in any way with this change of manner ? What could be the meaning of it ?

Mary found herself thinking a good deal what could be the meaning of it. Her speculations on the subject had even interest enough in them to keep her awake at night. Pshaw ! what did it signify whether Mr. Lancaster's manner was a little more one thing or a little more the other ? She told herself that it really signified so little that she would think no more about it. And having come to this resolution, she found herself, on retiring to her chamber after their next singing meeting, not only lying awake to think of and analyse every word that Lancaster had spoken, and every tone of his voice in speaking it, but wetting the pillow on

which the pretty puzzling head was lying with silently trickling tears.

And then came the question, what did this strange conduct on her part mean? What was come to her, that she could not but be conscious that what this man said, and did, and looked, had come to be with her the matter of most interest to her in her life? Surely she was as strangely or more strangely changed than he? What could be the meaning of these things?

Possibly Mary's self-examination may have led her to some more or less accurately correct discovery of the truth. It may have been that she detected the secret of her own heart, and discovered that she was beginning to love this man. But it is certain that her manner also towards him began to change, became more reserved, less frankly gay, and marked, as it seemed to him, by capricious fits of what he took to be displeasure.

And then the tempter whispered to him that it could not be necessary or right for him to behave to her in such a manner as to cause her to resent his rudeness. Surely mere civility required that he should soften from his too great rigidity towards her. But at the bottom of his

heart he knew that it *was* the tempter that whispered these suggestions in his ear, and he sternly bade him to get behind him.

Thus it was brought about—with a view of providing against the evils that might arise from love between Mary Artingale and Purcell Lancaster—that both of them spent a considerable number of the hours out of each four-and-twenty in thinking about and minutely commenting on each word and look of the other. I do not think that either party found that this course of regimen answered the end intended. But for all that, Purcell remained true as steel to his resolution, let the fox beneath his cloak bite as fiercely as he might, and gave no sign of what he felt, unless that new reservedness of manner which has been spoken of may be considered as such.

At last one day—it was about the tenth or twelfth after Lancaster's return from Sillchester—Mary could endure it no longer, and determined to reproach “her drawing master,” with his changed manner towards her.

She came with her sketch-book in her hand, and with her usual tap at his study door, at the usual time, about a quarter before two o'clock.

Lancaster bowed gravely, placed a chair for her—the studio now boasted more of them than the one solitary seat which had constituted all its sitting accommodation in the first days of his tenancy—and gravely took the book from her hand, and set himself to examine what she had that morning done.

“You find a great deal that is bad in my morning’s work, I see, Mr. Lancaster, by the way you look at it,” said she, poutingly.

“Not so, Miss Artingale; there are some things that need correction; but I think you are making progress,” said Lancaster, with cold gravity.

“I cannot find that I do. In fact, I think that my recent attempts have been worse than some of the old ones. And, to tell you the truth, Mr. Lancaster, I have thought that you perceived that they were so,” said Miss Mary.

“Nay, Miss Artingale; why should you suppose that? One drawing will often be better than another—there are a hundred chance reasons why it may be so; but on the whole I do think that you are making progress.”

“I did think so too. But lately—I—have

seen that you were less pleased than you used to be with my work. Perhaps you are getting tired of the thankless task of instructing such a dull pupil," said Mary, blushing, and with her eyes fixed on the floor.

Lancaster turned his face quickly from the drawing at which he had been looking towards her, and saw her standing like a chidden school-girl, with downcast face, and an expression of pouting, half-pettish trouble on the features, and thought that he had never seen her look so lovely before.

"*Very* far from that, I do assure you, Miss Artingale," he said, in warmer and more impulsive tones than he had in all these last past days used in speaking to her. But he recovered himself immediately, and added, in cold grave accents: "I am happy, on the contrary, to have it in my power to be of any use to any member of the family. If you will favour me with your attention I will point out to you what I think might be better in this sketch."

Mary looked from under her long eyelashes at him, with a half-wondering, half-reproachful look; and he thought—he thought, but he could not be sure—how he tried afterwards to

recollect whether it were so or not!—he thought that he saw a tear upon her cheek.

“I had a bit of india-rubber here,” he muttered; “pardon me, one moment; it must be among all these things on this table,” he said, hastily turning aside to a corner of the room, and searching for the missing bit of india-rubber, with his head down in the corner. Nor did he succeed in finding it till he had recovered sufficient command over his face and voice to feel safe that he should not betray himself. “Ah! here it is,” he said, then returning to the desk on which the sketch-book was lying.

“Yes, I am sure the india-rubber is what is most needed,” said Mary, with childish pettishness; “I am sure it will all have to be rubbed out. I think you want to rub out more than my bad drawing of this morning, Mr. Lancaster; you want to rub out all the pleasant lessons we have had together.”

Lancaster thought that his minute of retirement in the corner had sufficed to enable him to hold in due check whatever emotions might assail him. But Mary was trying him very hardly, almost too hardly for his endurance. He would fain have hid his face again on some

other pretext. But with a great effort he commanded himself enough to say, with a sort of stony composure—

“Not so, Miss Artingale, if the lessons have been of any *profit* to you,” putting an accent on the word profit, as if to mark its antagonism to “*pleasure*,” and to show that the latter was not to be recognized as having had anything to do with the matter.

“I used to like them *very* much before—before you were so—so—severe with me. But I see that you are not satisfied with me. And I know that that drawing is not well done—not even as well as I can do, for I was so interrupted and tormented. Mr. Felix Farland *would* keep bothering me. And I wished him at Jericho; for I was thinking all the time of what you would say to my drawing,” she said, as if she really was on the point of bursting into tears.

If I yield an inch—the hundredth part of an inch, thought Lancaster to himself, I am lost. Now is the moment for courage. I must be hard, hard as flint.

“But, if you will forgive me for saying so, Miss Artingale, what I should recommend as an

artist would be that you should, while at work, think only of the work—only of the features of the scene you are drawing—without any reference to the persons who are to see the drawing afterwards.”

Now the tears were very palpably on Mary Artingale's cheeks. But it was possible to attribute them to other feelings of mortification than any specially personal to her drawing master.

“Give me my sketch,” she said, putting out her hand to the book; “I will not let you see that drawing; it is too bad. I will do it over again before I show it to you. I won't have any lesson to-day. I don't feel in a humour for it, and should not profit by it.”

She took her book from the desk on which it was lying as she spoke, and turned towards the door of the little room. For a moment Lancaster made no reply, but stood gazing at her with a look of dreamy speculation and infinite sadness in his eyes. Then, suddenly recovering himself, as conscience told him that even so, and even then he was running risk of losing the battle he had been fighting so hard to win, he said—

“As you please, Miss Artingale. In any case, I shall be perfectly ready and most happy to see it whenever you choose to show it to me, and, as always, to give you the small benefit of any suggestion I may have to offer.”

“Very well, Mr. Lancaster. I will do it again; and will hope that this time I may not be disturbed at my work by Mr. Farland’s assiduities.”

Lancaster stepped to the door to open it for her, and bowed formally as she passed out.

“And, oh, Mr. Lancaster, I had almost forgotten to say that my aunt desired me to ask you, if you have no other engagement, to drink tea with us, and have some music afterwards—as usual,” she added, after a slight pause before the last words.

“I shall be very happy to obey her summons. Good morning, Miss Artingale,” said Lancaster.

And so the “drawing-lesson” was at an end.

CHAPTER X.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

IF the little scene which has been described in the last chapter had been felt by Miss Artingale to have had the effect of unfitting her for profiting by her drawing-lesson, Lancaster had been effectually disabled by the violence of the emotions and the struggle he had undergone from turning the afternoon to any good account over his plans and estimates. So he pulled his hat over his brow, and turning the key of his little studio behind him, left the Castle by passing through the ruined chapel, which was the route by which he was wont, as I think was mentioned in a previous page, to come to and go from his work, so as to need the intervention of no servant to open to him ; and, setting his face

northwards towards Billmouth, started for a solitary stroll.

It is hardly necessary to say what was the subject of his meditations. He hardly knew whether he was contented or discontented with himself. Assuredly he had struggled hard and had fought well. Assuredly he had been ruled in all that he had said, and in all that he had left unsaid, solely by the thought of what duty and high honour required of him, disregarding the pain. Assuredly if Mr. Henningtree and Miriam could have been by unseen, and have heard and seen all that had passed, they would have accorded him their praise. But yet he was not wholly contented with himself, and very rebelliously discontented with fate and fortune.

He was not wholly contented with his conduct towards Miss Artingale during their recent interview. On looking back to it—considering word by word all that he had said, and all that she had said—it seemed to him that he had been little less than brutal to her. He had so spoken as to bring the tears into her eyes. He was sure—he was almost quite sure—that he *had* seen tears on those lovely cheeks. That he should have distressed her—have made her weep by his

savage crossness! He had been a brute—nothing short of a brute.

And yet what was he to have done? What sort of language was he to use? What shade of bearing and manner to adopt? He was a boor. What! could he not behave like a courteous gentleman, without giving the lady to understand that he was in love with her? He had no facility—no talent for such management. How much better she had behaved! *She* had no difficulty in bearing herself like one as wholly fancy free, as completely heart-whole as maiden need wish, and yet at the same time behaving herself courteously — *courteously!* pshaw! with a sweetness and grace of manner that must needs captivate any heart!

Ah! heaven! What a peerless darling she was! Was it not enough to melt a heart of stone—the gentle reproach in her voice and eye when she had accused him of being less kind to her than formerly? But *he* had not been melted. He had been a stock, a stone—harder than a stone! He had made her cry by his unkindness!—Ha!—What?—Yes! she *did* cry—cry for *his* unkindness! What if—Bah! Bah! Bah! Yet she *did* cry! Do high-born maidens usually

cry if their drawing-masters speak coldly to them?—if they are less than kind to them? Scarcely so, surely. And then when she sought to excuse the shortcomings of her drawing by telling him that she had been disturbed by the troublesome presence of young Farland. Why need she have told him that? She recurred to it a second time. The stupid oaf had tormented her when she was thinking all the time what he—what HE, PURCELL LANCASTER—would say to her drawing! Why, that was saying that she was thinking of HIM all the time! Bah! Fool! fool! She was thinking of her drawing. What of that? and Lancaster stopped in his walk, stamped his heel into the ground, and cut down the unoffending wild flowers with his stick, as the thronging thoughts rushed through his brain. And yet—and yet—(his thought went on)—yet the words *did* mean that—‘thinking what *I* should say.’ She was thinking of me all the time that blockhead was trying to make her think of him! And she told me that this was so!—told me so with tears in her sweet eyes, brought there by my cold words!

“What if—what if I be not indifferent to

her!" His lips shaped the words slowly and tremblingly, though scarcely any breath passed them to form a sound, and the expression of his face had as much of terror as of joy in it as the thought fashioned itself in his mind. "What if—oh! heaven!—what if even now—even at this hour, she *loves* me!"

He threw himself at length upon the turf, and closed his eyes, while his mind was striving to compass the immensity of that thought, and of the sequel thoughts it brought after it.

"Can it be true? if it should be true, oh, earth! oh, world! how new, how fair, how freshly clothed would you seem to me! But if it could be true—what!—God, who sees my heart, knows that I have not been false—not guilty in this! I spoke truly to my good friend at Sillchester. I did speak truly! I have not sought to win the love of this peerless girl—of this star above me! I have known her place above, and mine below! I have *not* used thus basely, to bring sorrow on her and hers, the opportunities which have been so kindly, so hospitably given to me! I can lay my hand on my heart and say that I have not sought to do this thing."

And Lancaster, in these thinkings, was perfectly sincere.

He was sincere; but not very deeply learned in that branch of psychology, on the secrets of which he was pondering. There are extant writings of an ancient student of this department of philosophy—one Ovidius Naso—which might have taught him better. But Purcell's bookish hours had been given to other studies; and he had trusted to Nature for needful teaching in the matters which he had now in hand. And Nature, in truth, fails not to teach; but she conducts her lessons illustratively by exhibiting results, and leaves her students to work out the causes and the rationale of them by their own reflective powers. The above-mentioned Ovidius Naso has done this with some success; and a study of his writings would have shown the young artist, as I say, that this question of *seeking love* is not one to be answered quite so easily and summarily as our young friend imagined.

Thou hast never said to thyself, "Lo! I love this maiden, and I will now bethink me, how I may win her love!" Tush! go to. Hast thou never taken her hand in thine? And what knowest thou of the secrets that palm whispered

to palm in that touch? Have thine eyes never met her eyes? And thinkest thou that they furnished a perfectly full report of all that passed in that meeting, perhaps a whole second in duration, filled with the busiest interchange of communications? Thinkest thou, I say, that a full and detailed report of all this was sent in to mother conscience, sitting at home in her inner home, and busied with taking notice of so many other things. Pooh! pooh! eyes meet and chatter, and then tell no tales out of their own school. Ye met; and thy voice reported to conscience that it had said "Good morning, Miss Artingale!" Dost thou really imagine that it said nothing else? I think that it told her, in those words, that thy heart yearned towards hers. And I feel no doubt that her heart fully understood and took note of the information.

As to this matter of seeking love, therefore, I think it must be ruled, that although Lancaster was wholly sincere in what he said to his friends at Sillchester, and in the similar statements which he made to his own heart, yet that Mary Artingale, even admitting that her love had been won—and I suppose this will have to be ad-

mitted by default—must be acquitted of having given it unsought. And both parties to pay their own costs.

Lancaster, lying on the turfy bank, on which he had thrown himself, as has been said, went over and over again in his mind each word and look that had passed during Mary Artin-gale's visit to his studio that morning. And with a strange mixture of feelings, in which rapturous delight at the increasing conviction that she did really care for him, misgiving self-examination as to his own conduct, and terror for the consequences of such a love, if indeed it really did exist, were curiously confused and blended, he was meditating deeply on the present and future, as they showed themselves in the light of such possibilities, when he was startled by an approaching footstep.

He sprung to his feet, as if he had been in danger of being detected in some heinous sin; and facing angrily towards the new comer, perceived the next moment that it was Captain Curling.

The captain, as Lancaster knew, was not much given to walking exercise; and though the spot where they were was not far distant

from Woodbine Cottage, he was rather surprised to see him there a-field, and apparently in as meditative a mood as himself.

“Hallo! ship ahoy!” hailed the captain, as soon as he recognized the architect. “What! Mr. Lancaster, you here? Well met! you are just the man I wanted to see.”

“Well met then, indeed, captain,” said Lancaster, smiling.

“Yes; I should have come down to you at the cottage to-night if I had not met you now, for I have something to tell you.”

“Better than ever that you have met me now, then, captain, for you would not have found me at home this evening. I shall be at the Castle,” said Lancaster.

“What, are there night watches in your trade, too? I thought you did all your work by daylight,” said the captain, wiping his forehead with his Bandana handkerchief.

“Not quite all of it, captain; but to-night I am not going to work, but to drink tea with the ladies at the Castle.”

“Ay, the ladies at the Castle. Poor things! I am as sorry for them as if they was my flesh and blood. But right is right, you know;

and George—he is more like my own flesh and blood than they are.”

“But what do you mean, captain? What’s in the wind now?” said Lancaster, not without a sudden leaping of his heart into his throat; for he guessed dimly that the captain’s words must have some reference to the question of the succession of the Artingale property.

“Why, storm is in the wind! That’s what it is, Mr. Lancaster. It is beating up from the windward, if I am not mistaken, and we are going to have dirty weather,” said the captain, shaking his head.

“And what is it that you were wanting to tell me?” asked Lancaster, anxiously.

“Why, I’ve made up my mind, that’s what it is,” said the captain; “and it’s no use saying one thing and meaning another.”

Lancaster, though disposed to grant this, did not see that the captain’s having made up his mind upon the subject was likely to exercise any such important influence upon the matter as that worthy man seemed to imagine. If that was all the captain had to communicate to him, it seemed hardly worth a walk from Wood-

bine Cottage to old Hannah's residence to announce it.

"Yes," continued the old sailor, "I have been a long time about it, a-studying of the charts, and considering the nature of the bottom, and the navigation. I've been at it ever since we first talked it over, and I've made up my mind at last."

"Talked what over, Captain Curling? I suppose, though, of course you are alluding to what was said between us of Fraser's possible parentage, and the succession of the present baronet to the Artingale property?" said Lancaster.

"That's it," said the captain, nodding half-a-dozen times; "why, bless your heart, I have been thinking of nothing else since, I may say in a manner."

"And now you have made up your mind as to what are the probabilities of the case?" asked Purcell.

"Well, I don't know that I have done that quite. You see it would take a wiser head than mine—a lawyer's head—to do that. I can't undertake to give any opinion as to the probabilities of the case," said the captain, putting his

head questioningly on one side, and looking into Lancaster's face.

"Then, pray, what is the point as to which you have made up your mind?" said Lancaster, somewhat mystified.

"Why, I've made up my mind what I mean to do," said the captain, striking his walking-stick vigorously upon the ground, and moving his head from side to side.

"What *you* mean to do, captain?" asked Lancaster, not a little surprised.

"Yes; you see I have been thinking, and thinking, and thinking; and at last I've made up my mind to go to America—to *America*," said the captain, nodding a strong emphasis on the words.

"You will go to America, Captain Curling?" said Lancaster, in utter astonishment; "and with what view?"

"Well, I'll tell you how it strikes me, Mr. Lancaster," said the captain, putting his stick under his arm, that he might have both hands at liberty for the due illustration of the positions he was about to lay down, and advancing one foot with an action very like that of a boxer taking up his position; "ahem! I'll tell you

how it strikes me. The old woman out there at Salem, George's grandmother, she must know *something* about it—not everything, may be—most likely not, but something. She knows, any way, more than she will tell. For she would never mention to her son or her grandson the name of the chap who served her so cruel badly. Now, mayhap, she would tell *me*. I never asked her anything about it. Why should I? I never thought that it might turn out to be of any consequence. But I've a notion that I could get her to tell *me*. Any way, I mean to try."

"And you really think of sailing for America, on the chance of persuading this old lady to tell you what she has all her life refused to tell her son and her grandson?" said Lancaster, looking wonderingly at the old man.

"The thinking about it is done at last, sir; and now I am going to do it. I am glad I chanced to meet you here; because if I had not found you at home this evening, I should have been off without seeing you," said the captain.

"So quick as that?" said Lancaster.

"Yes, I am off for London to-morrow morning. There's an old mate of mine will be sailing for Boston city from the port of London the day

after to-morrow or next day. I shall ship with him."

"It seems rather sudden, sir, don't it?" said Lancaster, who, strong as his own persuasion on the subject had been, thought that the captain was starting on rather a wild-goose chase.

"When I'd satisfied my mind what course I meant to steer, I never saw no good in waiting a while before I laid the ship's head that way," said the old sailor.

"And do you really think, sir, that there is any chance that you will be able to persuade old Mrs. Fraser to tell you what she never would tell her own son? A voyage across the Atlantic is no joke," said Lancaster, who really felt pity for the old man about to submit to so great a self-sacrifice, as he could not but think, to no purpose.

"As for the joke of a voyage across the Atlantic, I like the thought of it. It'll be the first time in my life that I was ever aboard with no work to do. It'll be all holiday time with me. Just think, being able to turn in, if ever there's bad weather, and give yourself no concern about it. I wouldn't ask no better fun. And as for the old woman, maybe I shall set about

asking her what I want to know a different way from what her son ever did. Any way, Mr. Lancaster, as I said before, I mean to try," concluded the captain.

"And have you told Fraser of your intention?" said Lancaster.

"Of course, he was the first I told, as soon as I had made my mind up, and that was at breakfast this morning. He don't think much of it—tried to put me off going. But it ain't so easy to keep Captain Curling in port when he is minded for to sail. Then 'pon another count he was well pleased that I should see his grandmother. His head can't hold but one thing at a time—George's can't. And now it is full of his love. And he is glad enough that I should tell the old lady all about little Bertha, and bring back her consent to the match."

"I suppose you have not mentioned the object of your journey to anybody else," said Lancaster.

"Not a soul; 'twouldn't do, you know. This matter was talked over between us three; and between us it must remain yet awhile. I did not think to tell you not to say where I was off to," said the captain.

“No need, of course I shall say nothing. Does Fraser remain here during your absence?”

“Yes, barring he is obliged to go to London on this everlasting business of his owners; he will stay and keep my nest warm at the cottage.”

“And you are positively off to-morrow morning?”

“As sure as the tide flows I shall weigh anchor,” said the old man.

“And have you any idea how long you may be before you come back?” asked Lancaster.

“All depends upon luck and the wind. Maybe six weeks ’ill do the job. I shan’t stop to come home in the same ship. Most of the trade know me, and if they don’t they easy may. I shall ship for the return trip in the first barkey that offers. Maybe I may be a couple of months; maybe, if I have luck, I might be here in five weeks,” said the old sailor.

“Well, captain, I wish you the best luck, with all my heart,” said Lancaster.

“Thank ye kindly, but wish me a good cargo home, a good cargo of intelligence. We shall see. And now I’ll be off to the cottage to dinner.”

“Good afternoon, captain, and good bye,”

said Lancaster, who was then left to meditate on the possibilities of result from the captain's voyage, and on the relation such result might possibly have to the subject of his thoughts before Captain Curling diverted for a time the current of them.

BOOK V.

THE CAPTAIN PUTS HIS HAND TO THE TILLER.



CHAPTER I.

FELIX FARLAND'S PROPOSAL.

It has been said that Mr. Decimus Oblong, the old bachelor, was wont to maintain, as one point in praise of his favourite annual festival of the sheep-shearing, that it furnished an admirable occasion for the meeting of the lads and lasses, in such sort that more matches were there arranged than in the whole year besides. And we have seen that in the case of two of the *dramatis personæ* with whom we have to deal, the influence of the festal season wrought as Mr. Oblong held that it did and should act. But the reader has had cause to surmise that in a second case on that same day it had not proved so efficacious.

While on that 24th of June George Fraser had been first pulling little Joe Smithers out of the water, and then disputing very successfully the prize of Bertha Donne's love with Mr. Garstang of Garstang Grange, Felix Farland, junior, had been offering his hand and heart to Mary Artingale—less successfully.

In making that offer Felix was unquestionably actuated by motives of a praiseworthy description. He conceived himself to be doing his duty—an unimpeachably respectable motive! *Noblesse oblige!* And he felt that it was due to his position as heir to Farlandstoke to marry the heiress of Artingale. He had yielded to his father's ascendancy over him in adopting this view. He knew that his father wished and intended such a marriage; and he considered it to be the right and proper thing to do. All the country, as he conceived, expected it of him. He had an uneasy feeling that if he failed in marrying Mary Artingale it could only be because he was—and would in such case stand openly confessed in the eyes of all men—too great a blockhead to win her. In a word, he felt that it had to be done.

Not that Mary appeared otherwise to him than

the most peerless she of all the Sillshire creation. He really did think her the fairest, the cleverest, the brightest, the best girl that had ever come within his ken ; "a real tip-topper," as he would himself with perfect sincerity have expressed it. It was proper and right that he should be in love with her, and he considered it a matter of course that he should be so. Did not all the country believe him to be so, and expect him to be so ? Besides, how could he fail to be in love with so much beauty and excellence ? He was fully impressed with the belief that he would be a most fortunate man in obtaining Mary for his wife, and altogether did not allow himself to conceive any other possibility than that he should love her, and woo her, and marry her.

It may be mentioned, by the way, that Mr. Farland, senior, had deemed it proper to keep altogether from his son's knowledge the fact of the arrangement between him and Sir Hildebrand, respecting the money lent for the restoration of the Castle. A gentlemanlike feeling of delicacy had prevented him from sending his son on his wooing weighted with the knowledge of this fact. And it was well that he did so, for the knowledge would have

been dreadfully in Felix's way. Far too really a gentleman to have dreamed of using it as an arm, he was far too awkward-minded to have known how to keep it out of his way.

He went to his wooing, therefore, like a *preux chevalier*, entering the lists at the call of honour and duty, and rating at its value the object of his high emprise. *But* there is no denying that he would on that sheep-shearing day have gone with a much lighter heart to make love to Lucy Hathaway.

It was a hard job for him, and he was terribly at a loss how to set about it. He had obtained her arm. He was alone with her among the crowd. The fitting time for commencing his operations had come, had indeed come, as his father had given him to understand, some weeks ago. The thing must be done, and there could not be a better opportunity than the present. Indeed, if after having notoriously had such an opportunity, he should return at night to Farlandstoke, and be obliged to report that he had taken no step towards the accomplishment of the task before him, he felt that his father would have reason to doubt his willingness to do his duty in this matter at all. That day, therefore,

he must ask Mary Artingale to be his wife. But *how* to do it—how to *begin*—that was the difficulty.

He walked her to the limits of the ground on which the marquees were pitched, in the direction of the Castle—the contrary direction to that which Fraser had taken with Bertha—saying a word from time to time about the beauty of the weather, and the number of the people assembled, and whom he had seen on the ground, and whom he had not seen, but with his mind deeply intent all the time upon the work cut out for him.

From the furthest edge of the little meadow in that direction, there was a good view of Artingale Castle. At that spot began that easier path of descent to the bottom of the valley which Miss Agnes had taken, leaning on Lancaster's arm. Mary would have followed them along this path. But Felix came to a dead pause there; and I think it is probable that Mary had a very shrewd suspicion of what was coming.

“Miss Artingale,” said Felix, gazing into her face with a look of earnest sadness, which was intended to represent tenderness—“Miss Artin-

gale," he paused for a minute before proceeding, "Artingale Castle is a very fine place."

"Indeed it is, Mr. Farland," said Mary, not a little surprised, and with a considerable feeling of relief. "I think it beautiful, but then you know, of course, I am prejudiced."

"Oh, no," said Felix, eagerly, "you could not be prejudiced. Nobody would suspect you, Miss Artingale, of prejudice."

"Would they not? They would be very wrong, then. At all events I suspect myself very strongly," said Mary, laughing.

"Nobody else would. But—I was going to say—that is—merely as a remark, you know—that—I was thinking of old times, you know—and of all the mischief that your grandpapa, the late baronet, did to the place."

"Yes, so I have heard. I have often heard papa speak of it. He never knew his father, I believe," said Mary.

"No; so I have heard my father say. *He* can remember Sir George. I have heard him say that it was quite a pity, quite terrible, to see the way in which the property was injured; the trees cut down, the lands mortgaged, and the Castle let to go to ruin," said Farland.

“Yes; so I have heard. It has been the work of poor dear papa’s life to repair the mischief his father did. Papa has done as much good as the late baronet did evil,” said Mary.

“Yes; quite so, quite so. I know that Sir Hildebrand has pretty well restored the property to what it was when his father came to it. But it had been injured before that—much dipped, Miss Artingale.”

“Indeed!” said Mary, unmeaningly, not quite understanding what could be the object of her companion.

“Yes, it was, Miss Artingale. My father—I believe he knows who every acre in the county belonged to ever since the world began—he says that the Artingale estates were much larger once upon a time.”

“Indeed!” said Mary, again, not finding the conversation interesting, but well pleased to find that she was not about to pass through the ordeal which she had more or less suspected.

“Yes, much larger. And, oh, Miss Artingale, what a thing it would be to restore them to the old name,” said Felix, looking into her face eagerly.

Felix considered that he had now discovered

in a masterly manner the true strategic approach to the fortress he wished to besiege, and had opened his attack admirably. Not that the honest fellow was by any means of a basely mercenary mind, or could conceive of love and love-making only as a matter of bargaining. Had he been making love to Lucy Hathaway, he would never have attempted to buy her by setting before her his rental and his wealth. But he had been given to understand that all the world expected him to marry Mary Artingale on this ground. It was an alliance between two county magnates, between two territorial estates. Though fully prepared to believe, and indeed believing, that Mary Artingale was in herself one of the most adorable girls in England, still he had been led up to the subject of marrying her by that road; and in his honest simplicity it never occurred to him that it was expedient for him to lead her to it by a different one.

“What a thing,” he said, again, “to restore to Artingale all that once was Artingale’s.”

Mary laughed and shook her head. “All that remains to Artingale will unhappily devolve on little me,” she said; “and I have no such

ambition. You see, Mr. Farland, I am unfortunately of the wrong sex. If poor papa could have had a son instead of a daughter——”

“But the name may be preserved,” said Felix, eagerly. “It’ll come all to the same thing. And Miss Artingale”—here he stooped his head nearer to hers, dropped his voice almost to a whisper, and in a tone of the most deeply confidential secrecy, continued—“look here now; between ourselves, quite between you and me, you know; the old folks may settle it which way they will; but I should have no objection to let it stand Farland-Artingale. I shouldn’t indeed. My father stands out for t’other way. But I have that respect—that—that admiration for—for—for the old place, you know, and the old name, that I shouldn’t mind—indeed I should wish it to be that way. And then, you know, Miss Artingale, it would not signify a button, as one may say, what sex you are of.”

“Mr. Farland,” cried Mary, in the utmost astonishment, and utterly without the smallest conception of his meaning. She withdrew her arm from his, and looked at him earnestly, as the thought crossed her that he must be tipsy. She had never heard of him that he was liable

to such excesses ; but gentlemen were very much more often in that way then than now ; and Mary supposed that the festive nature of the day must have led him into an excess unusual to him.

“ Mr. Farland,” she ejaculated, standing opposite to him, and looking searchingly at him. But she could not detect the smallest symptom of anything but the most perfect soberness in his manner and appearance.

“ Upon my word, Miss Artingale, I mean what I say ; I do indeed. And I am ready to pass my word to the baronet to that effect,” said Felix, with the air of one who really wishes the generous offer he is making to be accepted, but who is at the same time conscious of the magnificence of it.

“ Mr. Farland, I do not understand what you are talking about any more than if you were speaking greek,” said Mary, utterly bewildered and astonished.

Poor Felix took this as the unkindest cut of all. “ Speaking greek !” he said, reproachfully, “ I should never think of doing such a thing as that to a lady, Miss Artingale. I do know better than that. Come.”

“ No ; no ; Mr. Farland, I won’t accuse you

of that. I know you never speak greek except to gentlemen. But really and truly I have not the slightest idea of what you mean."

"Dear me. Well, look here now, Miss Artin-gale," he said, offering her his arm again, which, having convinced herself that he was sober, she did not refuse to take, and beginning to stroll slowly down the path towards the bottom of the valley; "look here now—quite between you and me. Of course the old gentlemen have canvassed it; and of course my father wants to have it his way; and Sir Hildebrand wants to have it his way. That is but natural, you know. You are aware that the old folks have canvassed the matter, Miss Artingale?"

"Canvassed what matter? I assure you, Mr. Farland, I have no idea to what you are alluding—not the smallest idea. I haven't upon my word. What matter do you refer to?" said Mary, in all simplicity.

"Why, the question whether it should be Artin-gale-Farland, or Farland-Artingale, of course. Because, after all, you know, Miss Artingale—I don't say my father is right; on the contrary, I have told you that I should be only too happy to yield upon the point; and indeed I would

promise you, and undertake that Artingale should come last; but after all, you know, we were here before you."

Miss Artingale really began to think that poor Felix's wits had altogether broken down at last. But catching at the last few words, the only intelligible ones he had uttered, she replied—

"Yes. I thought you would be. We came down with little Bertha and Mr. Lancaster from the cottage."

"Come now, Miss Artingale, you need not laugh at a poor fellow. That is not fair. I am saying the best I can," said poor Felix, stopping in the path, and looking reproachfully into her face.

"Really, Mr. Farland, we are playing at cross purposes and crooked answers, I think," said Mary, in despair, and beginning really to doubt whether he was in his senses, and almost to feel that strange sensation of terror which intercourse with a human being bereft of reason almost always produces; "I do assure you that I had no intention of laughing at you at all. I understood you to say that you were on the ground before us. But truly and really I have not

understood a word you have been saying all this morning."

"Well, I am sure I have tried to speak plain, Miss Artingale. Not this ground here. I was not talking about that; I was saying that the Farlands were settled in this country before the Artingales. You understand me now, Miss Artingale, and you are not angry at my saying it, I hope."

"Not in the least, Mr. Farland. I beg your pardon for misunderstanding you before. Yes. I have heard that your ancestors were at Farlandstoke before mine were at Artingale."

"Well, then, my father's claim is not altogether absurd, you will admit, nevertheless——"

"I am quite sure that Mr. Farland never claimed anything that was absurd. He is the last man I know who would be likely to do so," said Mary.

"Nevertheless, Miss Artingale, it would be my wish to please Sir Hildebrand in the matter. Let it be settled as he would have it. And then, you know, it really would not signify whether you were a son or a daughter."

"I do protest, Mr. Farland, I do not understand what you mean, or even what you are

alluding to. I assure you I really have not an idea of your meaning. What is the matter in which you would wish, as you kindly say, to please my father?" said Mary, with serious earnestness.

"Why in the mode in which the double name is to be borne, to be sure!" said Farland.

"What double name?" said Mary.

"The double name of Artingale and Farland, of course," replied Felix. "My father would have it stand 'Artingale-Farland.' Sir Hildebrand very naturally wishes it to be 'Farland-Artingale.' Of course he wishes it so. I think he is right, for my part," said he.

Then a glimpse of what was in her companion's mind suddenly flashed across Mary Artingale's brain. And she had a strong suspicion that this was Mr. Felix Farland's method of leading up to an offer of marriage. There was something so absurd in such a plan of wooing, that Mary, who would have enjoyed the joke most heartily if some one else than herself had been the object of the attack, could not, as it was, forbear smiling as the notion struck her. But she would fain have put an end to the conversation, if she had known how to do so. Having

gone, however, thus far blindfold into the trap, it was impossible to avoid allowing him to proceed with his explanation to the bitter end. She made, however, one faint attempt to turn him from his path.

"I am afraid you give me credit, Mr. Farland," she said, "for understanding these matters and taking an interest in them more than I do. I know nothing about these questions of family precedency. I have heard my father often talk of which came first — Farland or Artingale — Artingale or Farland. But, to own the truth, I do not care much about it."

"No; don't you, though? There, then, we jump together for one thing, Miss Artingale, beautifully. For it is all Greek to me, as you said just now. But it will be right to please your father, you know; and he does care very much, I can assure you. 'Farland-Artingale of Artingale' won't sound badly, will it, now? And then it will be just as good as if you were a boy, you know, won't it?"

"Really, Mr. Farland, I am obliged to tell you, once again, that I do not understand you," said Mary; not, it must be owned, speaking this

time with the perfect truthfulness that had marked her former protestations to the same effect. She did now understand what he meant, and make another desperate attempt to turn the conversation. "These are matters I do not comprehend; and I think we had better make haste and overtake my aunt. She must be down in the bottom there, where the shearing is going on, I suppose. Let us look for her there."

But Felix had been labouring too hard all this time, and had suffered too much, and had gone too far for him to acquiesce in a proposal that would have left him no more advanced than when he had begun. He felt that he should deserve to be called a coward if he suffered himself to be thus foiled now.

"But, Miss Artingale, my dear Miss Artingale, if you won't be angry with me for saying so," he said, in a tone of reproachful pleading, "you know it is necessary for you to understand something about it, since it all depends upon you."

She was clearly in for it, and saw that it must come now.

“What depends upon me, Mr. Farland?” she said.

“Why, the union of the two names, to be sure,” said Felix; “how can the two names be united—either Artingale-Farland or Farland-Artingale—except by uniting you and me? You must understand that, Miss Artingale.”

“Indeed I do not. What nonsense you are talking, Mr. Farland! Do let us speak of something else,” said Mary, with a pettish manner, but in reality much annoyed.

“We will speak of anything else you like, Miss Artingale, as soon as ever we have settled this. Will you consent to the union of Artingale and Farland? I assure you everybody would be pleased—your father, and my father, and everybody.”

“Nonsense, Mr. Farland; everybody except you and I. I am sure neither of us would be pleased at anything of the sort,” said Mary, feeling very uncomfortable.

“Now don't say that, Miss Artingale; that is not fair,” cried Felix, gallantly. “I am sure I should be pleased—better pleased, a mighty deal, than I could be in any other way in the world.”

"But it would not please me at all," Mr. Farland. Come, now, don't let us talk or think anything more about it," said Mary, hurrying on towards the crowd around the sheep-shearers, the close neighbourhood of whom they had by that time reached.

"Well, I won't say anything more then, at present, Miss Artingale, hoping to find a more favourable opportunity of renewing the subject. Only remember this, Miss Artingale," he continued, again dropping his voice, "I mean what I said about the name. It shall be Farland-Artingale, upon my honour."

"Indeed it shall not," said Mary, as they came up with Miss Agnes and Lancaster, who were standing looking on at the sheep-shearing, as she had anticipated.

"But I say it shall," whispered Felix in her ear as she left his arm to take that of her aunt, conceiving that she was but competing with him in generosity in refusing to accept the arrangement he proposed.

On the whole he was well contented with his morning's work, and thought he had made as much progress as could be expected. He would have less difficulty another time, he reflected, in

reopening the subject ; and determined that he would do so on the first occasion which should offer. He had always heard and understood that courtship was a long and sometimes an arduous affair, and by no means expected that Miss Artingale was to be his at the first time of asking.

CHAPTER II.

FELIX TELLS PAPA.

THE reader will doubtless have been more clear-sighted than Mr. Felix Farland, and have anticipated that no reopening of the subject was likely to bring his conversation with Mary Artingale to any satisfactory termination. He had, however, returned gallantly to the charge on two or three occasions subsequently to the sheep-shearing festival; of the last of which—when he had caught Mary at her drawing in the park—we have heard her own report, though it cannot be said that it was a full, fair, and impartial one.

He had then begged her in so straightforward a fashion to give him a definitive answer to his proposal, that she had been obliged to tell him that, despite her old regard and esteem for him,

she had not that affection for him which would make it possible for her to consent to be his wife, either as Mrs. Artingale-Farland, or as Mrs. Farland-Artingale. And she begged him, once for all, to put the idea of any such marriage out of his head.

She had spoken so decisively, and with such direct plainness, that poor Felix perceived at last that she was really and definitively minded to refuse him. And he honourably determined at once to tell his father of his failure. Honourably—for he had been giving his father to understand that he had been making fair progress with his wooing—as indeed, poor fellow, he had imagined; and he felt that he was bound at once to undeceive him. And he dreaded not a little the task of doing so.

That day the father and son dined *tête-à-tête* in the oak-pannelled dining-room, with the black oak floor, and the Turkey carpet, at Farland-stoke; and as soon as the cloth was removed, the servants out of the room, and the bottle of old port on the table between them, Felix began the task, to which he had screwed his courage.

“Do you know, sir,” he said, as his father pushed the decanter across the table to him,

"that I am afraid I shan't make any hand of this business you put me up to."

"What business do you mean? It seems to me that I have never been able to succeed in putting you up to any business, as you call it," said his father.

"Well, sir, I have done my best, I assure you. I wish you could have been by to have heard all I said. You would have admitted that I did all I could, and tried hard," said poor Felix.

"Tried hard at what?" said his father, quietly sipping his glass of wine; "you have not told me what you are talking about yet, Felix."

"Why, about my marrying Miss Artingale, sir. I have done my best to meet your wishes in the matter; upon my word I have, sir. But it is no go," said Felix, with a sigh.

"No go! what phrases you do contrive to pick up, Felix! No go! why, I thought you told me that you were getting on with her famously," said his father.

"I told you what I thought and hoped, sir. I began as long back as the Artingale sheep-shearing. I thought that was a good opportunity. It isn't so easy to catch her all by herself. I began it that day. And I thought

she seemed to come on as far as could be expected for a first set-to. And I went at it again three or four times since; and very hard I tried. There was nothing I didn't say. I am sure, sir, if you had heard me, you'd say it wasn't my fault. But I am afraid it won't do. It was only this morning that I tracked her in the park, where she was a-sitting a-making a drawing. I thought it was a good chance, for she could not well get away, being there sitting a-drawing with all her drawing things about her. And I thought it was time to get an answer one way or another. And the upshot of it was that she told me she didn't, nor never should, feel like taking me for a husband. And upon my word, sir, I think she meant it, I do indeed," said Felix, whose whole anxiety on the subject was very evidently to show that he had done his duty in the matter, as was expected of him.

"Pooh! pooh! I don't believe a word of it; girls don't always know their own minds in such matters; and if they do know them, they don't tell them at the first time of asking. She will accept you, Felix, in good time; never fear. Meantime you be gentle, but firm and persevering

with her," said Mr. Farland; "firm and persevering."

"I am sure I have been persevering, sir; very persevering, sir," said Felix, shaking his head.

"Well, go on being persevering," replied his father, rather testily; "stick to her. Did she condescend to give you any reason for refusing you, pray?"

"None, except that she could not feel that affection for me which she ought to feel for a husband. Those were her words, I know, for she said them over more than once."

"A parcel of girl's nonsense. Good girls love men because they *are* their husbands. And she will love you well enough when you are her husband. Always supposing," the senior hastened to add, "always supposing that they don't love anybody else. And I suppose in this case there is no danger of that. Mary has seen nobody else."

"Well, sir, I don't know about that," replied Felix, dubiously. "Not that I have any reason at all," he continued, "to think that she cares about anybody in particular; but as for seeing, there is young Fraser, and Mr. Lancaster. The last is always about her."

“Felix, how can you talk such nonsense? I declare it makes me ashamed of you to hear you say such things. Mr. Fraser, and Mr. Lancaster! the one a mate in an American merchant ship, the other an architect’s assistant, brought up by charity, and without a penny in the world, or a name in the world that any one ever heard of. Upon my word, it is an insult to Miss Artingale to have let such a thought pass through your head.”

“I didn’t sir; I never thought it,” said poor Felix, eagerly.

“But you should not have thought of it. Why, the young American is engaged, I am told, to that little girl, the granddaughter of old Sir George’s housekeeper—and a very proper match too. And as for Lancaster, if he had dared to take advantage of his position to lift an eye to Miss Artingale, I fancy the county of Sillshire would speedily have become too hot for him to exist in it. Mr. Lancaster indeed! Not but that I esteem Mr. Lancaster much in his proper place. I consider him a young man of real talent, and I shall always be glad to lend him a helping hand, if I can; a very modest and properly behaved young man. And I should

think the last person in the world to have conceived such a thought as that you were supposing possible just now. You wrong him almost as much as you do her, by supposing him capable of such wickedness and treachery. You might as well talk of Mary Artingale falling in love with one of her father's footmen."

"But I did not talk of it, sir," protested Felix; "I only said that she saw them."

"Saw them, blockhead! Why, so she sees old Decimus Oblong, and the church steeple; *saw* them indeed!

"It was you who spoke of her not seeing anybody, sir," remonstrated his son.

"Pooh! don't talk nonsense. Of course I meant saw anybody with whom there could be any possibility of her forming an alliance," returned his father. "But never mind," he continued, "you stick to her. Persevere. Be all that is gentle and submissive; but do not take 'no' for an answer, and you will find that it will all come right."

Poor Felix sighed at the prospect of the work thus cut out for him. It was very hard for him to have to begin to roll his Sisyphus stone up

hill again, when he had fancied that it had now rolled down so definitively to the bottom of the hill that he would have been absolved from the necessity of any further efforts to get it to the top.

The conversation, however, had produced a greater effect on the old gentleman than he had judged it expedient to allow his son to perceive. Not that he had any serious doubts as to the due accomplishment of the marriage in time. Mary was an Artingale, and would no doubt act as all the other ladies of the family had acted from time immemorial. She would of course take the husband provided for her by her family. What an example had she not before her of what was demanded of a woman by family duty in the person of her admirable aunt, Miss Agnes? And indeed it was the fact that she had no chance of forming any other attachment. She absolutely did see nobody but his son. As to the stuff Felix had talked, it was too monstrous to deserve a moment's thought. It would no doubt all come right enough. But Felix was not capable of managing the affair solely by his own resources. He could not be trusted with it in his own unaided hands. And his father

thought that the time was probably come for bringing up the heavy artillery, and settling the matter. "Colophonem addere," as the old gentleman phrased it to himself, as he concluded his meditations on the subject, before going to bed, by determining to see Sir Hildebrand on the morrow.

On the following morning, accordingly, an hour or so after breakfast, Mr. Farland mounted his horse, unaccompanied by his son this time, to ride over to Artingale on a visit to the baronet. Riding through the park, he saw, at too great a distance from the road for him to speak to her without hallooing, Miss Artingale sitting under one of the trees of a fine group of elms with her sketch-book on her knees, making a study apparently of an old thorn which stood isolated on the turf at a few paces distant in front of her. And at her side, standing a little behind her, so as to overlook her drawing-book, he saw Mr. Purcell Lancaster. Mr. Farland frowned for an instant, but in the next he said to himself, Pshaw! a parcel of stuff, it's a good chance to get some drawing-lessons, that's all. I think I see Mr. Lancaster daring to think of Miss Artingale, save as a bright

particular star, so far in the firmament above him, that its light reaches to his eye only by reason of its exceeding brightness. The heiress of the name and estates of Artingale! It is too preposterous! With these thoughts he chased away the frown that had come over his brow as he reached the house; and asked cheerily for the baronet of the old servant who came to the door.

“Yes, Sir Hildebrand was in his study, and would be very happy to see his honour.”

Mr. Farland found the baronet in his old place, at his writing-table; only that, instead of the account-books that used to make the subject of his usual morning study, he was now occupied with a multiplicity of plans, measurements, drawings, elevations, sections, and estimates.

“Morning, Farland. I am so glad you rode over this morning, for I particularly wanted you to look at what Lancaster is proposing for the chapel. Do you mind coming with me to look at the place? We shall find Lancaster somewhere about the place, or in his room.”

“No; we shan’t find him there,” returned Mr. Farland, with a shrewd look under his eyebrows at the baronet; “for I saw him under

a tree with Mary in the park as I rode up to the Castle."

"Mary thinks he has nothing in the world to do but to give her drawing-lessons. I believe he really has taught her a good deal. But she works him a little too hard. I'll send Richard to call him," said the baronet, stretching his hand towards the bell.

"No; stop a minute. We will go to the chapel afterwards; but I rode over this morning to speak to you about another matter, Sir Hildebrand; and if you will kindly give me a few minutes, Mr. Lancaster will very probably have returned to his studio by the time we are ready for him."

"Very good; take a chair. Now then, I am all attention. Any new idea about the north façade?"

"No; nothing special. I have been thinking of that, and we will talk about it presently. But I wanted to say a few words, Artingale, on another point."

"Nothing amiss, I hope?" said the baronet, a little nervously.

"No—oh, no. It will all be right enough. But look here, Artingale. Felix, it seems, has

been opening matters a little with Mary, and finds the lady a little more difficult to win than he had fancied—a presumptuous young dog! I have told him that such a prize as Miss Artin-gale is not to be expected to drop into his mouth directly he opens it. But he is shy and backward, you know, and easily discouraged.”

“I don’t think Mary would have been likely to say anything that ought to have discouraged him,” said the baronet, smiling pleasantly.

“I am sure she did not. And so I told him. But he declares that she told him roundly that she would have nothing to say to him,” returned Farland.

“Pooh! nonsense!—mere nonsense of boys and girls. Why, you may guess how far she could really have meant anything of the sort from this—that we have heard no word about the matter at all!” said the baronet.

“She has said nothing to you or her aunt?” asked Mr. Farland.

“Not a syllable; and it is quite out of the question that she should have thought of refusing—or, indeed, of accepting—a proposal of that kind without doing so, as you may easily suppose,” rejoined Sir Hildebrand.

"Of course; of course. And young ladies very properly do not choose to be won too easily. And boys and girls naturally want to get a little amusement out of their flirting! That's all about it!" said Mr. Farland, with a smile.

"That's all! Never fear that Mary will make any difficulty about doing her duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call her," said the baronet, quoting reverentially from the catechism—his sole provision of theological learning and storehouse of pious quotations—and feeling, as he did so, that he was basing Mary's duty to marry Felix Farland on an unquestionable foundation, the mere citing of which was a pious act very creditable to his own religious principles.

"Quite so; quite so," acquiesced Mr. Farland, not without a little twinkle in his eye—far too slight an indication of the fleeting thought that produced it to be perceptible to the heavy baronet.

"Mary is an Artingale every inch of her!" said Sir Hildebrand, with some pride; "and will do her duty as such, no less than the daughters of our house have ever done."

“I am fully persuaded of it, my dear Sir Hildebrand—fully persuaded of it. And I told Felix as much, indeed. But I thought it as well just to ride over and have a word with you upon the subject. Perhaps the time has come when it would be as well to impart to Miss Artingale—if it has never yet been done—the views which her family has formed for her,” said Mr. Farland.

“Perhaps it *would* be as well. Perhaps you are right, Farland. Mary is quite young; and her aunt, I believe—herself a thorough Artin-gale, and one whose principles and feelings are entirely to be trusted in such a matter—has thought it best to say nothing on the subject hitherto. But I agree with you, that the time has now come when it would be as well to do so,” said the baronet.

“I think so. I think it would be desirable. And I am glad that I determined on riding over to speak with you on the subject. Not that I had any doubt about it, as I told Felix,” said Mr. Farland. “I hope,” he added, “that you think I was right in coming to you.”

“Quite so; quite so. I am much obliged to you. It *is* time that Mary was spoken to. But,

heaven help us, Farland! the boys and girls grow up, and are ready to take our places, while we think they are still babies," said Sir Hildebrand, putting his hand on his neighbour's arm, and looking wistfully into his face as he communicated the novel idea.

"*Eheu fugaces, Posthume, Posthume!*" said Mr. Farland, with a shrug.

"Quite so; quite so," said the baronet, nodding his head up and down, and with as much notion of the meaning of the words uttered by his old friend as the spaniel had which was lying on the bright spot of carpet gilded by a sunbeam shot through the window.

"And now," said Mr. Farland, "I am quite ready to go with you to the chapel, when you like."

So the two fathers left Sir Hildebrand's study, and passing through the body of the Castle, now occupied by workmen in almost every part of it, called at the little room next the chapel, which had been turned into a studio for the architect, to see if he was there. But there was nobody there. The drawing-lesson apparently had not yet come to an end.

The baronet "pished" and "pshawed," and a

carpenter's boy was sent to call the truant. "Sir Hildebrand's compliments, and if Miss Artingale's drawing-lesson was completed, he and Mr. Farland wished to speak with Mr. Lancaster in the chapel."

In a few minutes Purcell made his appearance, looking rather confused, and with a considerable and unusual quantity of colour in his cheeks, as Mr. Farland did not fail to observe, though it never occurred to the baronet to notice so trivial a circumstance. But then the young man had been running—was evidently out of breath; and this was no doubt sufficient to account for the flush in his face. Besides—"pooh! it is *too* absurd!" said the old gentleman to himself, as he gave himself up to the consideration of the artistic questions to be submitted to him.

CHAPTER III.

ARTINGALE EXPECTS MARY TO DO HER DUTY.

MR. FARLAND, notwithstanding his protestations both to others and to himself that the idea was monstrous, absurd, utterly out of the question, ridiculous, was not altogether free from a certain degree of uneasiness respecting the marriage between his son and the heiress of Artingale, on which so much depended. It was true that he did not place any great confidence in his son's report as to the result of his wooing. He thought it likely enough that Felix, with his characteristic *gaucherie*, might have been so brusque and abrupt with Mary Artingale as to have brought on himself almost necessarily some more or less serious repulse, the value of which he was, boy-like, disposed to estimate far more highly than it deserved. He had much faith

too in the old Artingale creed, that no daughter of the house would dream of giving her hand otherwise than in accordance with the manifest requirements of the family interests and dignity, and in the authority which her parents would be ready to exercise over her in this matter.

But his faith was not so perfect on this subject as that of Sir Hildebrand. He knew a good deal more of the world and its ways, and of human beings and human hearts, than did the baronet. There *were* such things as young ladies who absolutely insisted on having a voice of their own in such matters. And it was impossible for the shrewd and highly cultivated old gentleman to conceal from himself the possibility—to use no stronger word—that if Mary Artingale *were* so new-fangled in her ideas, and so little imbued with right feeling and high principle, as to be forgetful of the ancient Artingale traditions on this subject, and *were* to aspire to the exercise of a free choice of her own in the matter, it might be that that choice would not fall on his son Felix. Mr. Farland knew his son quite well—knew what he was—and was under no illusion on the subject.

It had been a great grief to him—the mani-

fest impossibility of making his only son in any degree a man of book-culture or refinement of mind—an impossibility to which, after much struggling against it, he had been at last compelled to open his eyes. “*Naturam expellas forcâ; tamen usque recurrat!*” sighed the old gentleman. But the quotation was scarcely an appropriate one; for he had never been able to drive out the nature he would fain have changed, even temporarily, by any means, however violent. He knew, on the other hand, that his son was good, upright, honourable in thought and deed, brave, and simple-hearted. There was quite enough for the father’s love, but not enough for the old scholar’s ambition or for his sympathy.

He was fairly entitled to say and to think of the man of whom he knew all this, that there was wherewithal to make a good husband, specially in a case in which, happily, there was no bread-winning needed. But then the goodness of him in that capacity depended on the lady for whom the husband was intended. And Mr. Farland knew Mary Artingale almost as well as he knew his own son. He knew that her mind and character were rich in exactly all

those qualities, faculties, and capabilities of which his son was destitute. And it did occur to him that it might so fall out, that Mary might so strongly feel the want of such elements of sympathy and companionship, as to be blinded to the value of those excellencies, which were offered for her acceptance. He could not conceal from himself that there was at least a possibility of this.

Then the artistic and clever old scholar had taken a very shrewd and correct estimate of the young architect. Mr. Farland of Farlandstoke had quite enough of family pride, and was quite sufficiently imbued with all the feelings and opinions which would teach him that such an alliance was monstrous, to look upon the possibility of such a thing as an attachment between this young man and the heiress of Artingale as an abomination not to be thought of. But he knew what the young man was. He knew that he was richly dowered with all that his son was deficient in. He knew that if the two young men had been otherwise on an equality, there could not be a moment's question which of them would be the pleasanter companion in the eyes of Mary Artingale. The baronet was

altogether incapable of comprehending anything of all this. But no tittle of it escaped Mr. Farland; and he could not help feeling a certain degree of uneasiness accordingly.

Sir Hildebrand, on the contrary, had not the slightest shadow of misgiving on the subject. In all perfect good faith he would just as soon have dreamed of there being possible danger in allowing his daughter to speak with old Decimus Oblong, as with the architect hired to "do the repairs" of the Castle. So little impression did all that Mr. Farland had said make on his mind, that although he had been quite sincere in agreeing with him that the time had arrived when it would be just as well to apprise Mary of the destiny intended for her, the matter had seemed so little pressing to him, and so much less interesting than the discussions which had followed about the restoration of the chapel, that when Mr. Farland quitted him, the latter remained in possession of his mind to the entire exclusion of the previous subject of their conversation. During the remainder of the day Sir Hildebrand's thoughts continued to be busied exclusively by architectural subjects. Nor did the sight of his daughter and Mr. Lan-

caster singing the then favourite duet of "The Manly Heart," from Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, that same evening, have the effect of recalling the subject to his consideration.

As he was crossing the hall, however, when leaving the little boudoir to go to bed that night, on taking his candlestick from the hall-table, his eye happened to rest on a card which Mr. Felix Farland had left that morning, on being told by the servant that the ladies were not at home; and the sight of it recalled the topic of his conversation with Mr. Farland to his mind. So he carried the card upstairs with him, and placed it on his dressing-table, that it might remind him in the morning of the duty that lay before him, and of the discourse which he had promised to address to his daughter.

Duly reminded by this contrivance, he descended to the breakfast-table the next morning, intending as soon as the morning meal should be over, to call Mary into his study, for the purpose of communicating to her the destiny intended for her. He was expecting Mr. Oblong at half-past nine, and the breakfast-hour at the Castle was half-past eight; so that he would have but a few minutes for saying what he had

to say to Mary. But he thought that there would be plenty of time, as the communication he had to make might be put into a very few words; and Mary, as soon as she had heard it, would naturally like to talk the matter over with her mother and her aunt.

“Mary, my dear,” said he, as soon as he had eaten his second egg and drunk his second cup of tea; “if you have done breakfast just come with me a minute into my study; I want to speak to you.”

“Yes, papa, I have quite done,” said Mary, jumping up, and little dreaming of what was awaiting her.

“Sit down, dear,” said the baronet, shutting the door of his study as they entered it: “I won’t keep you five minutes;” and he turned his own chair round sideways from the writing-table for her to occupy, while he took up his place standing on the rug with his back to the fireless grate.

“I was thinking the other day, Mary,” he began, “and I dare say the same thought has occurred to you, that you are placed in a more important and responsible position than any lady of our house was ever placed before. You

are the sole heiress of the property, and, what ought to be considered as more important still, of the name of Artingale. And of course, inasmuch as the line of descent has ever hitherto from time immemorial been from father to son, no daughter of the house ever before occupied your position."

"It is too true, papa. I wish with all my heart, I had been a son instead of a daughter! that is all I can say," said Mary, with half a sigh, and half a smile.

"We all wish that, of course, my dear child," said the baronet, with a wave of his hand; "but in that, as in smaller matters, we must submit to the decrees of Providence, which *may* have some object in view, that—that, in short, we are not aware of. But what I was going to remark was, that the peculiar position in which you are thus placed, of course, makes it your manifest duty, even in a higher degree than that which has been the case with all the ladies of the house in former generations, to *do* your duty," said the baronet, somewhat tautologically, "your duty to yourself, your family, your ancestors, and your name, as Artingale expects it of you."

Here he paused; and Mary, anxious enough

now as to what might be coming, and not without some misgiving as to the nature of the subject to which her father's words were the preface, finding herself obliged to say something, muttered, "Yes, papa."

"Yes! quite so, Mary, dear—to yourself, your family, your ancestors, and your name—your duty to yourself, your family, your ancestors, and your name."

"Yes, papa," said Mary again, still more faintly than before.

"And, therefore, as you are now old enough to feel this properly; and, indeed, to be called on shortly to *do* that duty, I have thought that the time has come when it is right to communicate to you the views which your family have formed for you. I trust, and have little doubt, that they will be altogether agreeable to you; but I need not—I trust I need not—tell a daughter of our house, that whether they be or be not such as you might fancy, your duty to your family is, in any case, paramount, unquestionable, and entirely imperative—paramount, unquestionable, and entirely imperative."

And there the baronet again rested on his oars for a short space.

"I am attending to every word you say, papa," said Mary, rather falteringly, finding, from her father's pause, that she was expected to make some reply. She could not in honesty again answer by a simple "Yes" to all that he had said; and she was steadfastly determined that she would be honest, wholly honest in all that she might be obliged to say with reference to the coming communication.

"Good, my child," said the baronet, "that is what I wish you to do. Well, then, looking to all the considerations by which the question ought to be ruled—to the position of the property, which came to me from my father in a very different condition from that in which I shall, I hope, transmit it to my heirs—to blood and family standing—to personal qualities also, which have by no means been overlooked, I assure you, Mary—looking, I say, to all these things, it has been decided that it would be impossible to find a more desirable match for you than Mr. Felix Farland."

"But, papa——"

"One moment, my dear. I will take advantage of the few minutes before Mr. Oblong will be here, to point out to you—not that any

such pointing out ought to be necessary—but you are not only my daughter, but the heiress of the name of Artingale; and some more marked consideration may be considered due to you as such;—to point out to you, I say, some of the more prominent advantages which have led to the above-mentioned decision, resolution, arrangement, and determination.”

“But, papa——” Mary attempted to interpose.

“One moment, my dear—decision, resolution, arrangement, and determination. Ahem! In the first place, my dear, we look, as we are bound to look, to family and blood. In this respect we could desire nothing better. There are not above half a score of peers of the realm whose claims on this score could compete with those of Farland of Farlandstoke. I won’t allude on the present occasion to poor dear Mr. Farland’s futile claims to a standing in the county superior even to our own. They are preposterous, of course. But it may be very safely asserted that the Farlands are second to no other name save that of Artingale. In the next place, it cannot be denied that in the circumstances produced by the condition in which your grandfather left the estate and the Castle, wealth is a material

consideration. And Felix Farland, our friend's only son, will be a very wealthy man. Then neighbourhood ought to go for something; for much, indeed, when it is considered how advantageously the Farlandstoke property would complete our own. Then as regards the young man himself, we all know him to be an amiable, high-minded, and honourable gentleman—amiable, high-minded, and honourable. Yes, indeed, amiable, high-minded, and honourable. But, my dear Mary, there is one point”—and here the baronet lowered his voice to a confidential and most emphatic tone, little above a whisper—“there is *one point* of paramount importance, on which I have reason to hope, notwithstanding a little natural opposition, that we may obtain in this match, what we should endeavour, probably, in vain to attain in any other of at all similar advantages. I am disposed to hope—to hope, mind, I say—that the name might be preserved (the baronet's voice trembled a little with a tender emotion as he spoke the words), the grand old name, Mary, and that your excellent husband would be content that he and his posterity for ever should be known as Farland-Artingale of Artingale. Think what a repara-

tion of a crushing misfortune that would be! We could hardly perhaps expect as much from a stranger. But Farland has a great feeling for the old name—that must be conceded to him—a great feeling which does him honour. And now, my dear child,” continued the baronet, raising his voice to its usual pitch, and speaking in a cheery, satisfied tone, “I think I have said all that is necessary. Run away now, and talk it over with your mother, for I hear old Oblong in the passage. Unless you would like to announce your intended marriage to the old man yourself, indeed. He will be right well pleased to hear it—poor old Oblong!”

“Don’t speak of it, please papa, till I have seen you again,” said Mary, in a low voice, and looking very pale, as she got up to leave the study, just as the old steward entered it.

She slipped past him, with a nod and a wan smile, and running, not to her mother, as Sir Hildebrand had suggested, but to her own room, bolted the door on the inside, as she entered it, and threw herself into a chair to think.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY DOES NOT TELL HER LAWYER HER WHOLE
CASE.

MARY bolted the door and threw herself into the chair to think. But thinking was not so easy. Her head whirled, her brain seemed to swim, as she sat with her two hands grasping tightly the two arms of the chair, and staring with meaningless eyes at the door by which she had entered. For some minutes she feared that she should faint; and rising from her chair like one walking in their sleep, she went to the wash-hand-stand, and pouring a little water into a glass swallowed a mouthful of it with difficulty. It made her feel less faint, however; and she seated herself again, strongly determining to compel her mind to do its function despite the disorder of the nervous system. Not so easy!

And by this time her hands and feet had become deadly cold, and her head hot. Gradually, however, the power of thinking with some degree of clearness returned to her, and she bent her whole self-command to the task.

To marry Mr. Felix Farland! But little thought was needed on that chapter of the matter. She should never marry Mr. Farland. That was impossible, and needed no further thought. She knew that she should not marry Mr. Felix Farland. Nothing on earth, no consideration and no power, could move her to do so. So the question of doing so, or not doing so, of the horror of being compelled to do so, of what it would be to be his wife, was dismissed from her mind without any dwelling on it.

But there was much room for thought, and much need of thinking of the consequences that would arise from her not marrying him. And these had to be considered, not in the nature of a possible alternative, seeing that the supposition that she might do as she was required to do had been dismissed as not to be entertained for a moment. The consequences of her refusal to do her father's bidding in this matter were therefore to be faced as certainties.

She had never, as far as she could remember, refused obedience to her father in anything. She had never, to the best of her recollection, angered him in any way. She was not aware that she had ever seen him really very angry. What would be the consequences of making him so? But Mary was not a coward; and it may be safely said that grief for her father's disappointment had a very much larger share of her thoughts than fear for what might be the possible consequences of her disobedience to herself. She could perfectly well understand how great a grief this refusal of hers would be to him. She knew well how deeply he felt upon all subjects connected with the name, dignity, and prosperity of the family. She knew that it would be the destroying of the hope of a life. And her heart bled for his disappointment and his sorrow. But none the more for that could she admit for an instant the possibility of her doing what was demanded of her. That was simply impossible—monstrously impossible.

Then suddenly dashed through her brain a thought that sent the tingling blood with a rush into every furthest nook and corner and extremity of her body. Why was it so utterly

unthinkable even that she should marry Felix Farland? And honest conscience answered that it was because she loved another. Yes. There was no longer any possibility of doubt upon the matter. In the glare of the light which had been flashed into every crevice of her heart by the lightning bolt that had struck her, she saw and could not deny to herself the truth. She loved Purcell Lancaster.

But even as the undeniable consciousness flashed through her, while her cheeks were yet tingling with the thought of it, she hastened to reconcile herself to her own heart, by vehement though unvoiced protestation that never—no never—would she make a marriage that would seem to her father an unworthy one, or one without his consent.

And then the deep well-head of her tears was loosened, and the briny flood gushed from her eyes, and the bodily agitation, which was causing her temples to throb, and her heart to be wrung with shooting spasms, was in some degree stilled. Her bodily agitation was stilled, as the wind drops when the clouds are opened and the rain flood comes down; but none the less sad and full of suffering did the future spread itself out

before her mind. Yet she reiterated to herself again and again the assurance that never would she listen to vows of love from lips that spoke without her father's sanction; and the resolution seemed to form a self-justifying set-off to that other determination, which formed the immutable base of all her thinking.

What would her Aunt Agnes say? That was another large and most vital chapter of the subject—perhaps, to Mary the most vital of all. She grieved most for her father, and for the disappointment which she well knew would be so bitter to him. But to her own personal capabilities of standing up under the misfortune which had fallen upon her, the view her aunt might take of her conduct was yet more important. Surely, surely, her aunt must sustain her in her refusal to marry a man whom she could not love. She was ready to do for the name and for the family all that her aunt had done. She was ready to immolate her love on that same altar. She too could sacrifice every dearer hope, rather than disgrace the noble name which she had the misfortune to bear.

And, ah! what a misfortune she felt it to be, as the thoughts thronged through her aching

brain. How she envied little Bertha at the cottage. For it was a mockery and a dishonesty, as she admitted to herself, to pretend to doubt that Lancaster loved her. She had doubted on that day when she had left his studio without a drawing-lesson, saying that she would do her sketch over again; she had doubted on that day whether he indeed loved her. And she blushed afresh amid her tears at the consciousness of the misery that doubt had caused her. But his manner had been different afterwards—so different that reading the result of that day's conversation by the light of his subsequent words and accents and looks, she thought that she could understand it. Lancaster would never tell her that he loved her. He could not do so. She was no happy, portionless, nameless Bertha, that such happiness should be possible for her. He would never tell her that he loved her. Better that he should not do so. Far better. Better for them both. There could be but one answer possible to such a confession. None the less was the conviction that he did love her unspeakably precious to her—the only consoling thought—miserable as it was—in the view of the life-shipwreck before her.

It was on this part of the picture that her mind was dwelling, while the tears continuously, silently, and quietly kept trickling from her eyes, that she heard a step in the passage, which she knew to be her aunt's, and in the next instant a tap at her door. "Ah, then papa has spoken to her ; better so. I would rather so than have to tell her myself," she thought to herself, as she hastened to rise and go to open her door.

"My child, what is the matter?" cried Miss Agnes, stopping short as soon as she had entered the room a few paces, and shading her eyes with her hand to look at Mary, who was standing with her back to the window. "Why, Mary, you have been crying. What is it, my own darling?" she said, coming forward as she spoke, and putting her arm round the girl's waist, and drawing her head down upon her bosom. "My child, how you are sobbing. Come and sit here by me," she continued, drawing her towards a little sofa that stood near the foot of the bed, "and lay your head on my shoulder, and tell me your trouble."

"Don't you know, aunt?" said Mary, nestling to her side, and hiding her face on her aunt's shoulder.

"You frighten me, Mary. I know nothing. I came to see why you did not come to luncheon. I have been wondering what had become of you all the morning."

"Luncheon, aunt. It can't be luncheon time," said Mary, in astonishment. For in some cases sorrow will make the hours pass as fleetly as joy, when the mind is so stunned as to be able to take no note of their lapse.

"It is indeed, dearest, nearly half-past one," returned her aunt, caressing her.

"And papa has told you nothing?" asked Mary, with a sob.

"Nothing, dear. I have not seen him since he left the breakfast-room with you to go to the study," said Miss Agnes, who, however, began to guess that the sorrow which she had for a long time past foreseen had at length fallen upon her darling.

Mary lifted up her head and her eyes to her aunt's face, and looked into it long and silently, and oh, so piteously.

"Oh, aunt, aunt," she said, at length, bursting out into fresh weeping, "I am so miserable, so very, very miserable!"

"My child, compose yourself. You can

have no sorrow for which a remedy may not be found. What is it, Mary?" said her aunt, caressingly.

"Papa has told me," answered Mary, speaking with difficulty, and her words disjointed by sobs, "that it is my duty—my duty—to—to—ma—ar—ry Mr. Farland," she said, dropping her voice to a whisper as the fatal words passed her lips, and throwing her arms around her aunt's shoulders and hiding her face against her bosom; "and, oh, aunt, I cannot—cannot—cannot do it. It is my duty, but I cannot, I cannot. Oh, aunt, aunt, what shall I do? What shall I do? I cannot—I cannot!"

The latter words had been spoken amid a tempest of suffocating sobs; and her aunt threw her arms around her and hushed her on her bosom, as a nurse hushes a child.

"Darling, do not agitate yourself so fearfully; there now. Let us talk of it. You shall tell me all you feel, and think, and wish, my own child. If you feel that you cannot do as your father wishes in this matter——"

"Oh, no—I cannot—I cannot—I cannot—I cannot—no—no—no—I cannot—I cannot—no—no—no!"

And reiterating the same words, she fell into a fit of violent hysterical weeping.

Poor Mary, who had so often ridiculed the notion of hysterical emotion in other girls! and she would have fancied herself as little subject to such an affection as her father.

Patiently, lovingly, and gently her aunt soothed her, abstaining from ringing the bell, or calling any one to aid her in doing so. And by degrees the violence of the crisis expended itself, and the poor girl became more outwardly tranquil. Her aunt, taking her in her arms as if she had been a baby, had placed her on the bed, and was now sitting by the bedside with one of Mary's hands in hers.

"My child," she said, speaking low and softly, "God forbid that you should be required to make a marriage which is so repugnant to you. God forbid that any one here should ask you to do so."

"Papa said that it was my duty," said Mary, sadly.

"Did you speak to your father of your unwillingness—of the impossibility that you should make such a marriage?" asked her aunt.

"No, I had no opportunity; Mr. Oblong came in. I don't think I should have said anything

to papa if he had not come. I could not. He seemed to think it so certain, so absolutely impossible that I could object, much less refuse. Poor papa; poor dear papa! What can I do? What will become of me? What will mamma say? Mamma will think that I ought to do anything that papa says is my duty."

The general importance of the Lady Lavinia in the Artingale household may be judged from the position relatively to the other considerations of her sorrows which this last portion of Mary's troubles naturally assumed in her mind. It was impossible that it should be otherwise. Lady Lavinia was a cypher, and chose to be so. It was certain that her opinion and behaviour in the matter that was breaking Mary's heart would be a mere reflection of those of her husband. There was no chance that Mary might hope to find any support or comfort from her mother in a course of resistance to the line of conduct required of her. But, on the other hand, her mother's disapproval, though painful, would not make the matter *much* worse than it would be without it. The fact was that her aunt really held in her heart, as she had ever held in her life and her bringing up, the place

of a mother. And it had already brought inexpressible comfort to Mary to find that her aunt would not be ranged on the side of those who would urge her to do what she felt it to be so impossible for her to submit to.

“Your mother, my darling,” said her aunt, “will of course wish you to be guided by your father’s counsel in this matter, as she would herself be guided. And I am sure, Mary, that you would not wish to act in such a matter without his guidance. But I do not believe that either of them would wish to force a marriage on you that was utterly repugnant to you.”

“Aunt, I would never act, as you say, in such a matter without papa’s guidance, or contrary to his wish, or without his consent. He said so much to me of my duty to the family name. And I know how much he clings to all that belongs to it. I know that it would break his heart if I disgraced it. And, aunt, you may depend, and he may depend upon it, I never, never will.”

Here the tears broke out afresh ; but they were no longer hysterical sobs, but quiet, silently falling tears.

“Poor dear papa !” she continued ; “I know how deeply he feels upon the subject. I know

all that he has done, all the labour he has undergone, and all the patient self-denial of a life, all for the restoration of the family greatness. I know it all, and I have hated myself because I was not a boy, and have thought—how often!—of all papa's love and kindness to me, despite the bitter disappointment my birth must have been to him. Poor dear papa! He has had so many disappointments; and now—but I cannot—cannot—marry Mr. Farland. Oh, aunt, I *cannot* do it.”

“With such a feeling, my Mary, it cannot be right that you should do it, and my brother will feel that as entirely as I do. I do not deny that it is a misfortune, a very great misfortune, that it should be so. It is a great misfortune. Young Farland I fully believe to be a very excellent and amiable young man, a good son, and an upright, honourable man. He is not clever, certainly. But, Mary, darling, it is not cleverness that can make a good, or a lovable, or a loving husband. And I will not deny that to the best of my judgment, Felix Farland would be to his wife all these things,” said her aunt, gravely.

“But *you* do not think that it is a duty I owe

to my family to marry him? Oh, aunt, you do not think that, do you?" said Mary, with tearful pleading.

"I have said, my child, that it cannot be a duty to marry without love, and love, alas! will not be commanded," replied the elder lady, with a sigh, a portion of which, perhaps, was given to the past. "That you should be wholly unable to give your love to one who would be in every respect such a husband as your family would wish, is, I repeat, a very great misfortune—to you and to us all. For it cannot be denied, Mary, that you do owe a duty to your family."

"I know that, dear aunt. I know I owe a duty to my family and to the name. Would that I had been born a poor man's child, like happy Bertha there!"

"Hush, dearest, hush! you must not speak in that way. For Heaven's sake, never let your father hear such a sentiment as that from your lips. '*Noblesse oblige!*' and surely no noble heart would wish to lose the nobility for the sake of getting rid of the obligation," said Miss Agnes, with an air that might have marked her as the heiress of all the pride of all the Artingales.

"No, aunt. I will not wish that, if I can help it," said Mary, submissively. And, aunt, I do know that my duty to my family demands that I should not marry in a station below that to which my name belongs. Papa need never fear that I shall disgrace the name in that way," said Mary, with a sigh that was almost a sob.

"May you never be tempted to do so, my dearest Mary. May it never be your lot to have that sacrifice demanded of you which was demanded of me, and which I paid," said Miss Agnes, with grave melancholy.

"But I could do that, aunt, for the honour of the family. I, too, could do that, and would do it. Why should not I live, as you have lived, honoured, beloved, and revered by all around you? Why should not such a life be permitted to me, as it has been to you?" said Mary, looking fondly into her aunt's face. "I could do that, aunt; I could do that for the honour of the name; that is to say," she hastened on to add, with a conscious blush, "I think I could do so, if ever it should so happen that the case should arise that could put me to the test."

Miss Agnes did not answer her niece at once ; but sat for a short space deep in thought.

“ But, in the first place, Mary dear,” she said, at length, “ the position in which you are, and the position in which I was, are far from being the same. I was not the heiress to the estates and name of Artingale. I was a simple daughter of the house, of whom all that could by any possibility be required, was that I should not tarnish the name I bore by an alliance that might be considered beneath that position. Renunciation was all that any code of duty could require of me. And that sacrifice, as you know, my love, I did offer up on the altar of our family pride. May a similar sacrifice never be required at your hands !”

Mary’s conscience smote her a little for the disingenuousness of the last words she had spoken to her aunt. She was but too conscious that the case had arisen in which such a sacrifice was demanded of her. But she had spoken quite sincerely in protesting that that was a sacrifice which she was prepared to consummate. Not that it was probable she would ever have an opportunity of consummating it as her aunt had done. For Mary felt assured that Mr.

Lancaster would not take the step Mr. Perivale had taken. The cases were different, it was true. In the first place, Mr. Perivale had been in nowise bound by any such considerations as those which might be thought to be imposed upon Lancaster by the nature of the circumstances which had thrown him into the society of Miss Artingale. And, in the second place, her aunt, as she had herself just pointed out, was not in the position occupied by her as heiress to the family estates.

“But you do not think, aunt, that it is my duty to marry Mr. Felix Farland?” returned Mary, anxious to make good an alliance with her aunt on this the most important point of all.

“I have told you, dearest, that I cannot conceive it to be the duty of any woman to marry a man whom she cannot love. But in such a case as that before you, I do think that it is your duty to search your own heart thoroughly, to look at the proposal calmly, and as far as may be without prepossession, to be quite sure that it is no mere freak of unstable fancy that moves you to reject the marriage offered to you. I do think, Mary, that you owe that much to

your family. Have you done this seriously and conscientiously?"

"Indeed, if I know my own heart at all, yes, aunt; I have,—indeed, I have! Mr. Farland himself spoke to me some time ago; as long ago as the sheep-shearing. But I told him that such a thing could never be. He did not seem to mind it much. And, aunt, I do really believe that he has been told to marry me, as I have been told to marry him. I do think so. I do not believe that he loves me a bit more than I love him. And I fancied that, when I had told him it could not be, it was over and settled. I never thought that papa—oh, aunt, what can I say to papa? what can I say to papa?"

"I will speak to my brother, my love. I will tell him what you say. I will explain to him your feeling. You are not well enough now to come down to luncheon. Remain quiet here, dearest, and lie down. Sleep if you can; it is what would be best for you. I do not disguise from you that your father will be greatly disappointed. But he will not be unkind to you. I will do the best I can for you, my child."

"And if papa does not come in to luncheon, will you go to him, dear aunt, in his study; so

that I may be sure that you will have spoken to him?" said the poor girl, anxiously.

"I will, dear child. Lie down quietly, darling; and be sure that I will speak with my brother in the course of the afternoon," replied Miss Agnes.

"And when you have seen him, will you come back to me here, dear aunt? it will be so kind of you. For I shall be so anxious!" pleaded Mary.

"I will come, darling; I promise. Now try to keep yourself quiet."

So Miss Agnes left her, and went down to find Sir Hildebrand—the baronet sometimes came into luncheon, and sometimes not—and execute her embassy as best she might; bearing herself no lightsome heart in her bosom.

CHAPTER V.

SIR HILDEBRAND SAYS POOH, POOH !

MISS AGNES descended to the dining-room ; and after a while Mary slept. She would have declared and thought that it was utterly out of the question that she should do so. But the violence of her emotion had exhausted her, and she was under twenty.

It was with no easy mind that her aunt set her face to the execution of the embassy she had undertaken. She admitted to herself, and laid down as one of the points of the case not to be altered, the fact that the proposed marriage between her niece and Mr. Felix Farland could not be brought about. She had thought it her duty to tell Mary that she was bound before rejecting the proposal to give it fair and mature examination, and to be sure of her own heart.

But she had said so with little or no hope that any such examination would produce any change in her niece's feelings on the subject. It was but too plain to her, but too natural, and too easy to understand, that Mary should not be able to love young Farland. If the young man has been presented to the reader with any degree of success, the reader will probably share the impressions of Miss Agnes on this point. All that she had said in his favour Miss Agnes sincerely believed to be true—and it was true. True also in fact, and in the opinion of Miss Agnes, that “cleverness is not needed to make a good husband.” For all that, she knew well that it was impossible that Mary Artingale should love him. He was so—in a word, so everything that she was not. The two were not fitted to each other.

Miss Agnes had also admitted to herself, and had laid down as a principle from which no departure could be dreamed of, that Mary was not to be forced to marry a man whom she declared that she could not love. Indeed, she was well convinced that any attempt to bring such force to bear on her niece would fail in its object. She was quite sure that even in those old days,

when she was willing and ready to sacrifice so much on the altar of family pride, any such attempt would have failed with her. And she was perfectly convinced that her niece would not be found more malleable on this point. The attempt to put such compulsory force in action would occasion very great misery to all parties concerned; but it would have no other effect.

All these thoughts the ambassadress carried with her in her mind. But she was no less aware how great the disappointment would be to her brother. She did *not* indeed know *how* great it would be. For she was ignorant of the pecuniary arrangements made with Mr. Farland. But she knew that not only would all his hopes be frustrated, but all his notions and opinions outraged. Sir Hildebrand was a man who would probably assent to the proposition, nakedly put, that a girl ought by no means to be forced to marry a man against her will. But it would be difficult to bring him to admit, or to see, that his daughter could, should, or might have a will in the matter. Still more difficult—utterly impossible, indeed—would it be to make him comprehend in the slightest degree that Felix Farland was not a man whom it was to be expected that

such a girl as his daughter could love. He was a good man—a fine well-grown fellow—a gentleman whose forefathers had been gentlemen since the Conquest; he was even free from some of those habits which the majority of gentlemen were not free from, but to which some ladies might perhaps object. He did not even drink. What on earth could any woman want more? Companionship! Pshaw! a parcel of nonsense. Had poor dear Lavinia ever been a companion to him? Yet she had been a very good wife. And they had been as happy together as people could or ought to expect to be. No; it would be quite hopeless to attempt to explain to Sir Hildebrand that there was any reason why Mary should not love and marry Felix Farland. It would appear to him mere wanton caprice, and a wicked disregard, even a perverse disregard, of the sacred interests of her family, and of the duty which Artingale expected of her.

Then, again, Miss Agnes had at the bottom of her own secret heart a misgiving that this refusal of Mr. Farland by her niece, this utter impossibility that she should think of such a marriage without shuddering, did not represent the whole of the mischief and trouble that lay before them

all. She feared—she greatly feared—that Mary *had* found it possible to love somebody else. She feared—she feared, that her niece's perceptions of all poor Farland's shortcomings and deficiencies had been sharpened by the contrast, which had been continually under her eyes, presented by the particularly well-marked presence of all that Farland lacked in another.

She fully trusted that no word of love had passed between Lancaster and her niece. She felt perfectly assured that had such been the case she would have heard of it from Mary. It was not likely that Lancaster should have dared to speak any such word; probable enough that he might never have had Mary in his thoughts otherwise than as it became one in his position to think of her. And really amid all her sources of trouble, shrewdly suspecting as she did that her niece did not regard him with indifference, Miss Agnes hardly knew whether to hope that the young architect might have been ever duly humble in her niece's presence, or the reverse.

“You may put the luncheon on the table, and ring the bell, Richard,” said Miss Agnes, as she passed through the hall, when she saw the servant loitering, and wondering what was the

cause of the unwonted unpunctuality of his mistresses in coming to their midday meal. "Miss Artingale will not come down to luncheon. But ring the bell, that your master may know the luncheon is ready, if he likes to come in."

Sir Hildebrand would occasionally do so, if he chanced to be in his study and not busy. But he more frequently omitted to do so. Upon the present occasion it was a matter of much interest to Miss Agnes whether he would come or not. If he did so her disagreeable task must be begun at once. The cutlets and mashed potatoes were placed upon the table; the bell was rung. Miss Agnes sat down by herself at the table, with little enough of appetite for the food before her; but had placed a cutlet on a plate with the intention of trying her best to eat it, when Sir Hildebrand lounged in.

"Richard was late in ringing the luncheon-bell to-day, I think. Don't let him get into unpunctual ways," said the baronet, who had that love of precise punctuality which often characterises men of orderly minds who have little or nothing to do. "Where is Mary?" he asked.

"Mary is not very well. She is on her bed. That is why Richard was late. He was waiting

for us, and I was with Mary," replied his sister.

"On her bed! Why, what is the matter with her?" asked the baronet, with surprise. "She was with me in my study an hour or two ago, and was well enough then," he added.

"I was going to speak to you about her, brother. If you had not come in to luncheon, I should have come to you in your study," said Miss Agnes, with the useless talk with which those who dread the subject before them are apt to delay the moment of plunging into it.

"Why, there is nothing serious the matter with her I hope?" said the baronet, looking inquiringly at his sister.

"No, I hope not; nothing serious. You have been speaking to her, and she was much startled," said Miss Agnes.

"Startled! I spoke to her of her marriage. How should that startle a girl of her time of life? The time had come at which it was proper and natural that I should speak to her on the subject. There was nothing in that to startle her," said the baronet, a little pettishly.

"You are a man, brother, and young girls——"

"Perhaps it would have been better to have

let Lavinia speak to her. Mothers generally do that sort of thing, I suppose. But you know, Agnes, that her poor mother is not up to that sort of thing. Two to one, it would have proved too much for her."

The baronet spoke in all simplicity, without the slightest idea of quizzing or satirizing his wife's invalidism. But the simple truth was that it had never occurred to him to think of his wife in the matter, as it never occurred to any one at the Castle to think of the Lady Lavinia with reference to any of the daily business of life.

"Yes; perhaps it was better for you to speak to her yourself. But, the truth is, brother, that it was the nature of the communication you made to her that has produced a painful effect upon her."

"Painful!" cried the baronet, looking up at his sister, from the plate before him, "painful! I thought she would have been as pleased as Punch. Of course I did not expect her to say so. But she neither said nor looked anything to the contrary, as far as I could see. What the deuce do you mean by *painful*?"

"I am afraid brother—very much afraid—that

the proposed marriage with young Mr. Farland is most distasteful to her," said Miss Agnes, shaking her head.

"Distasteful!" cried Sir Hildebrand, frowning heavily, "distasteful! Look here, Agnes. All these matters are generally settled, I believe, between a mother and daughter, as I said just now. I wish with all my heart that there were no reasons why it should be otherwise with us. But so it is. Nobody knows better than you, that poor dear Lavinia is not up to these things, and I must insist that she is not troubled with them. Any agitation on such a subject might kill her. I wish, I say, that it were otherwise. For you women understand one another better than a man can. You comprehend all the little coynesses, and hanging back, and girlish ways, and all that—I don't. But I mean to do my duty by my child and by the family; and I set about so doing as kindly as I knew how. Manage the rest yourself; but do not let me hear anything more about distaste, or being startled, or going to bed, because you hear what you must have known all your life. How long, I wonder, in the name of fortune, did Mary think she was going to wait before the time for marrying her

came? I have told her—I say, again, as kindly as I knew how—that the time has come. She may think herself very fortunate in having found such a man as Felix Farland—a most fortunate match in every respect, yes, in every respect, circumstance, consideration, and point of view—in every respect, circumstance, consideration, and point of view. Do not let me, I repeat, hear anything more of difficulty about it.”

And Sir Hildebrand, who had testily pushed away his plate and risen from his chair at the beginning of this speech, and had taken up his place on the rug before the fireplace—that favourite rostrum of domestic orators—turned to leave the room as he concluded his unusually long oration.

But Miss Agnes knew that she had not done yet that which she had promised her niece to do, and that her task would have to be begun all over again, if she allowed the present conversation to be thus brought to a close. So she said, quickly—

“Stay, brother, one moment. I must ask you to give me a few minutes.” The baronet somewhat sulkily and ungraciously turned back from the door, and resumed his position on the

rug, while his sister, having turned her chair half away from the table, sat with one arm leaning on it. "I should not be doing my duty either to you or to Mary," she continued, "if I shrank from trying to put this matter before you as it really stands."

Sir Hildebrand moved his head impatiently, and shuffled his large feet angrily one against the other. "Pshaw! what can there be to be said?" he ejaculated, snappishly.

"Only this, brother, that I do not think that this proposed match between Mary and young Mr. Farland can be brought about."

"Agnes!" exclaimed her brother, still more in astonishment than in anger.

"I greatly fear," repeated his sister, shaking her head, and speaking with slow emphasis, "that it is a scheme which must be given up."

Sir Hildebrand stared at his sister for a moment in really speechless astonishment. He absolutely could hardly bring himself to believe that he heard her aright.

"Given up!" he cried, at last; "are you mad, Agnes? You don't know what you are talking about. Why, do you not know—but never mind that part of the question—look at

the alliance on its own merits. Will you tell me where a more desirable one can be found? Can a more desirable one even be imagined? Birth, fortune, neighbourhood, personal worth. Why, there is everything one could wish, really everything. And you tell me all idea of it must be given up."

"If, unfortunately, Mary cannot like the young man—" began Miss Agnes; but her brother interrupted her before she could get any further with her pleading.

"This from you, too, sister Agnes—from you, whom I have always considered every inch an Artingale, and a loyal one. I *am* astonished. I thought you had a higher idea of what was due from the daughters of our house to their family."

"So I have, brother. I *am* a loyal daughter of the house, and I have ere now proved myself to be so. But I cannot think that it would be right in any girl to marry a man whom she feels that she cannot love, or in her relatives to urge her to do so."

"Poo! poo! a parcel of nonsense," growled the baronet, angrily.

"Nay, Hildebrand, it is not nonsense. Would

you wish to compel your daughter to unite herself to a man against her own wish?"

"I say it is nonsense, Agnes. There can be no question of compulsion. I have no power to compel her, any more than I can compel her to eat food when it is placed before her. But I do say that to talk of abandoning such an alliance because a silly girl has not taken it into her head to fancy the man is nonsense, and monstrous nonsense. If he was a bad man—a worthless fellow—even if he were a specially ill-looking fellow. But what does she say against him? It is all a parcel of women's nonsense, I tell you, and I will hear no more of it."

"Brother, I assure you that you will——"

"I won't hear a word more, Agnes. You may tell Mary this from me. The position which she occupies is, for a woman, a very special and peculiar one, and one which entails special and peculiar obligations and duties. Tell her that to reject such a marriage as that proposed to her would be a criminal—a most criminal abandonment of those duties; and would be judged to be such not only by me, but by every human being who knows her, or knows

the circumstances. I have no doubt that she will see her duty and do it in this matter—no doubt that she will do her duty as an Artingale should. But I think that all this foolish shilly-shally work had better not have been told to me at all. It had better been kept among the women, as I suppose it usually is. Let me hear no more of it, I beg.”

And with these words Sir Hildebrand turned and walked out of the room, leaving Miss Agnes to meditations that were of anything but a pleasing kind.

Not that the result of her conversation with her brother had been much worse than she had anticipated. She had estimated pretty correctly the view he was likely to take of Mary’s objections, and the difficulty of making comprehensible to him any conception of the weight and seriousness of them. She was not, indeed, aware of the pecuniary arrangements which made it so vitally necessary to Sir Hildebrand that this marriage should take place. But she knew how grievously he would be disappointed at the failure of a scheme which, as he truly said, had everything in its favour, except the one little fact that the proposed bridegroom was

intolerable to the proposed bride. And she knew how entirely he would consider it to be a matter of course that a daughter of the house of Artingale, more especially one placed in the situation occupied by his daughter, should accept the marriage arranged for her by her family, and how incomprehensible it would be to him that any girl should have any really good and valid grounds of objection to so very unexceptionable a husband as Felix Farland.

All this she knew, and had foreseen with tolerable accuracy all that her brother had said to her. And now what was she to say to Mary? Was she to endeavour to induce her to submit herself to fate and her father's wishes, or was she to decide on accepting the rejection of Farland's addresses as an irreversible fact, on supporting her niece in the rejection of them, and on shaping her own conduct wholly with a view to comforting and consoling Mary as far as possible in the inevitable and terrible struggle which was before her. Many good women, especially good women placed in the social position of Miss Agnes, and influenced by the traditional feelings from which she was by no means exempt, would have decided on the

former alternative. Most such would probably have so decided, if they had no reason to suspect the existence of any preference for another person on the part of the lady; and some would have so decided all the more certainly and unfalteringly, if they had suspected the existence of an attachment so placed as that of which Miss Agnes had suspicion in the case of her niece. It required no slight tincture of romance, as it is conventionally called, and of imagination in an elderly spinster in the position of Miss Agnes to decide on the other alternative. The marriage with Felix Farland *was*—undoubtedly was, as the baronet said—everything that could be desired, in a social and worldly point of view. There was nothing that could be seen to render it otherwise than desirable to the great majority of girls in any other point of view. Was it not a case which might have seemed to justify, if any case could, the usual talk about “shaking down,” and “all coming right enough in a little while,” &c.?

Then there was the other consideration, to be drawn by Miss Agnes from her own shrewd suspicion of her niece’s liking for the young architect. Was it not most desirable, most

necessary, to put a stop to any such nonsense as that, by quickly reaching the safe haven of a fitting marriage. Mary had very solemnly declared, it is true, that she would never marry against her father's consent. And her aunt fully believed and gave her credit for strength enough to keep her resolution. But such self-sacrifice would entail much heart-ache and many a subsequent hour of bitter regret. How many and how bitter, none knew better than Miss Agnes. Might not a marriage such as that proposed be the surest and safest mode of escaping from so much unhappiness? Many people will say that Miss Agnes would have chosen the wiser course if she had gone back to Mary's room and told her that once for all she must shake off all fancies, get the better of them, and accept the good and honourable man who sought her hand.

Miss Agnes, however, had the wound in her own heart still fresh, unhealed and ever painful. To those who only saw her as most of us do only see our neighbours and acquaintances, Miss Agnes would have seemed the last person in the world to be suspected of being what is called romantic. Her outward appearance was as

much the contrary to anything of the woe-begone kind as can be imagined. She was cheerful, brisk, active, a good woman of business, and a shrewd judge of most of the questions of life. But deep down among the roots of her nature there was a well-spring of youthful feeling, a fresh imagination, a capability of sympathy, a capacity for seeing and appreciating the facts of life from the poetic standpoint, which constitute the phase of character which, for want of a better term, we call romantic.

Besides this, and above all, Miss Agnes knew her niece—knew her more completely and thoroughly than it is often given to one human being to know another.

And she decided, before raising her head from the hand on which it rested as she sat at the table after her brother had left her, that she would not attempt to drive Mary into a marriage with Mr. Farland, but would, on the contrary, do all that in her lay to smoothe the difficult path before her, and support her in the terrible struggle which she would be called upon to pass through.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR HILDEBRAND'S DIPLOMACY.

It must not be supposed that the baronet, despite the tone in which he had replied to the communication made to him by Miss Agnes, was altogether as confidently easy about the result as he had wished to appear. On leaving her he had betaken himself to his study, and bolting the door, had sat himself down to think in no pleasant state of mind.

Who could have dreamed of such perversity? Who could have supposed that a daughter of his, brought up as Mary had been, under the eye of such a woman as her aunt, would have ever conceived it to be a thing at all upon the cards, that she could reject a marriage arranged for her by her family, and on which all the interests of the family depended? Surely never

was a man tried by fortune so hardly as he was. Such a marriage, too—a marriage that any girl might jump at. Bah! it was all nonsense, mere girlish nonsense. It must be all nonsense. It could not be that a daughter of the house of Artingale was going to bring ruin on the family in this way for a mere caprice. And that his girl—his Mary—who had ever and always been such a good, right-thinking, and obedient girl! He could not and would not believe it. It was contrary to nature, and impossible.

Ay, ruin. Would it not be ruin that would result from the refusal of Mary to do her duty? Where on earth was he to obtain the means of repaying Mr. Farland his advances—very heavy sums, which had exceeded—as such amounts invariably do—the provisions which had been considered ample? Where was he to get this money? What would be the result? What would Farland say? Farland would think that he, Sir Hildebrand, had failed to do his duty in the matter. Yet, what could he do? If Mary *were* to be so ill-advised as to continue her opposition to this marriage, what could he do? He could not force her. He could not

even use anything approaching to cruelty to bend her will in the matter, even though it was for her good. It was not in his nature to be cruel, especially to a woman. What could he do beyond talking to her? He could set before her all the wickedness and perversity of her conduct. He felt that he could do this in a manner that ought to make it impossible for her to resist his eloquence. But if she *did* resist? What would be the result? It made the cold perspiration stand on Sir Hildebrand's brow to think of it. He must have another talk with Mary—not that day, it would be better to wait till the morrow morning. He would give her time to consult her pillow. It was a counsellor that often suggested wisdom. And with such thoughts running round and round in a somewhat monotonous circle in the small and well walled-in *champ clos* of his mind, Sir Hildebrand took his hat, and holding it in his hands crossed behind his back, and losing out of it his gloves, as usual, before he had got a hundred yards from the door, went out to ramble in the park, and compose the sermon he meant to preach to Mary on the following morning.

Miss Agnes with some difficulty persuaded

Mary to come down to dinner that day ; but she *did* persuade her to do so at last, and Mary got up from off her bed, and after much bathing of her eyes, came down to the dining-room. The dinner was *triste* enough, each one of the little party, except Lady Lavinia, who chanced by a rare exception to dine that day at table, knowing what was in the hearts of the other two, but not caring to speak of it. There was no music that evening, Lady Lavinia retired very early to her room ; and very shortly afterwards Miss Agnes and Mary went upstairs together, but not immediately to their respective chambers.

“Come with me to my room for a few minutes, darling,” said Miss Agnes, as they went upstairs. “I want to have a little quiet talk before we go to bed. I know you are worn out, dearest. I won’t keep you long.”

And then it was finally decided between the aunt and the niece that Mary had no choice but to oppose a quiet but unrelenting negative to all the representations which might be made to her on the subject.

“It is a great misfortune, a great and bitter disappointment for my brother. I am most

heartily sorry for the pain it will cause him. But I cannot conceal from myself, my dear, that it would be a greater evil still for you to marry a man towards whom you feel as you do towards Mr. Farland."

Mary replied only by a deep-drawn sigh, and her aunt continued—

"In all probability, my dear, your father will speak to you again on the subject to-morrow morning. You must have the courage to tell him clearly that such a marriage can never be. It would only make matters worse for him if you were to leave the matter so that he might hope that you would yield in time—worse for him, for you, and for all of us. If, as you assure me, you know your own heart, if your mind is entirely and definitively made up, tell your father so, and do not let him delude himself with hopes that can only deceive him."

And then Mary went to her own room—not to consult her pillow, for there was no room in her mind for consultation on the subject—but to wet it with her tears, till like a child she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning, after breakfast, came the dreaded summons for Mary to accompany her

father to his study. She had fully laid to heart the counsels her aunt had given her, and was prepared to represent to her father, as firmly and temperately as she could, the impossibility of her ever accepting the addresses of Mr. Farland. She had again and again thought over the words she should use in setting forth this determination, and had expended much study in the attempt to make them combine as much firmness and finality of resolution as possible, with the greatest degree of respect and the strongest expression of her sorrow that she should be unable to comply with her father's wishes.

But all this trouble and forethought was thrown away. For Sir Hildebrand was not minded to allow her any opportunity of speaking. His purpose was to say what he wished to say to her, but not to hear anything from her in reply. The fact was, I take it, that the baronet was unwilling to be convinced that all hope upon the subject must be abandoned. He knew that he should be obliged to speak to Mr. Farland on the subject afterwards; and he preferred to have it in his power to tell him that he had good hope that all would go well. The evil

day would at least thus be put off. Time would be gained. Something might "turn up." Mary herself might come round, and there would be an obstacle the less in the way of her doing so if she were not permitted to put on record her own refusal. For these reasons, joined to a certain fear of coming to an unseemly altercation with his daughter, the baronet had determined that he would keep all the active share of the conference to himself.

"Sit down, Mary, my dear," said Sir Hildebrand, as soon as the study-door had closed on them, "of course you know what it is I have to say to you. I have been thinking over what passed between us here yesterday morning, and you on your side have doubtless been doing the same."

"Yes, papa, I——"

"Do not interrupt me, my dear. It will be better that you should hear and lay to heart what I have to say to you. I say we have no doubt both of us thought over what was said yesterday morning. And I am confident that your good sense and good principle will have led you to feel that you will not be justified in suffering a silly caprice to interfere with your

proper establishment in life and the interests of our name and family. To be entrusted by Providence, my child, with the sole charge of the name and fortunes of Artingale is a great responsibility," said the baronet, with much of awe in his voice and manner, "and is a privilege which quite precludes you from acting in this matter on those considerations which might rule the conduct of some village girl. In a word, Mary, you must not, cannot, will not refuse this very advantageous alliance. Mr. Felix Farland is a good man, an honourable man, a gentleman, and will make as good a husband as a girl could wish for herself, or the fondest parents could wish for her. You do not, perhaps, know all the reasons, you are not fully aware how absolute is the necessity for this marriage. It is enough that I assure you, my child, that the prosperity and welfare of the family entirely depend upon it. It *must* be carried out. I am sure I may trust to your good sense and good feeling not to be the cause of such great misfortunes to the family as would result from your refusing from mere caprice to fulfil the engagement that has been made for you."

“But, papa——”

“I have nearly finished what I wished to say, my child,” said the baronet, with a wave of his hand, “and I beg you will not interrupt me. I was merely about to add to what I have already said, that I shall see Mr. Farland to-day, and shall tell him that a little time must be allowed to the difficulty which a young lady is often apt to feel in making up her mind in these matters, but that his son need not fear but that with a little patience all will be right. And now, my dear——”

“But, papa,” exclaimed Mary, more anxious than ever to protest against any such statement being made to Mr. Farland. The baronet was fully determined, however, not to let her have an opportunity of doing this.

“Once again, my dear, I beg you not to interrupt me. I was going to add that you had better now go and quietly think over what I have been saying to you. I have no time for further conversation now. I am going over to Farlandstoke. Think of it well, my dear child, and your good sense will show you that I am right. Go, my child. I must be off.”

“But papa,” poor Mary began, once again,

almost desperate with the thought that it was to be assumed in this manner that all her opposition was overruled, and the case, as it were, decided against her unheard.

But it was of no use.

“Not now, Mary. I have no time now. I must be off. Go to your room, my dear child. Think over all I have said calmly, and you will feel that I am right. Go now,” and Sir Hildebrand opened the door for her as he spoke. Mary felt that there was no hope that she would be allowed to plead her cause. It was clear that her father had determined not to hear her. With despair in her heart, she dropped her head upon her bosom, passed out of the study, and went to her own room, as he bade her.

The baronet took his hat and did set off to walk to Farlandstoke, as he had said, congratulating himself much, as he walked, on the masterly manner in which he had managed the interview with his daughter, and feeling as if he really had finally settled the matter in his own way.

He found Mr. Farland at home, and did, as he said he would, tell him that he had spoken

seriously to Mary, that Felix must have patience with her, that girls would be girls in these things, but that it would all be right enough in the end. And Mr. Farland was disposed to be quite contented with the report.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HENNINGTREES AT FARLANDSTOKE.

IT was near the end of August, and matters remained *in statu quo* between Mary and Felix Farland. He had been told by his father that he must persevere, and all would come right at last. And he was content to believe, "good, easy man, that his greatness was a-ripening!" Mary on her side had been content to assure him, at every renewal of his suit, that it was a vain one. She was not much tormented by him; for he found the work cut out for him very hard, and by no means pleasant. He had found a confidante, too, whom he had called to council—an old friend, into whose sympathising ears he found much comfort in pouring his sorrows—our old acquaintance Miss Lucy Hathaway. Lucy was all sympathy and indignation

at the want of appreciation, which could permit *any girl* to remain insensible to such a suitor. Her sympathy was very agreeable to Felix, far more agreeable than the uphill task of making love to Mary Artingale. Lucy pitied him so sweetly, and made him feel very sensibly how closely akin such pity was to love.

Meantime in those latter days of August, the mail cart which carried the letters from Sillchester, arriving at Billiford with the earliest dawn, brought one day the two following epistles on the same morning.

One of them was opened at the Farlandstoke breakfast-table by Mr. Farland, and ran thus :—

“MY DEAR FARLAND,—At last I have contrived to arrange for a few days’ absence ; and purpose running over to see how things are getting on at Artingale. As far as I can learn from Lancaster, much progress has been made, and I shall expect to see great things. Miriam insists upon coming with me. She says if you did not mean her to take the first opportunity of coming again, you ought not to have made Farlandstoke so agreeable during our last visit. My compliments to the baronet. Tell him I

look forward with much pleasure to going over the Castle under his guidance. How does the chapel come on? We purpose being with you on the arrival of the 'Hero' on Friday evening. Miriam sends all kind messages to you and your son.

"Yours always faithfully,

"My dear Farland,

"CYRIL HENNINGTREE."

The other was received by Purcell Lancaster at the cottage, and ran thus:—

"MY DEAR PURCELL,—It is settled at last that we are to go to Billiford on Friday. Henningtree writes to Mr. Farland by this day's post to tell him to expect us; and of course you would hear of our coming from him. But I thought that you would prefer to hear it from ourselves. The object of the journey is, of course, that Henningtree may see what you have been doing at the Castle; and that he might, strictly speaking, have been able to do without my aid. Nevertheless, I determined to accompany him, as I wish to judge for myself how some other matters have been going on, of which the letters

that have very particularly told him all about your architectural progress have told me nothing. So I mean to come and see for myself. I hope with all my heart that I may be welcome, not so much at Farlandstoke, you understand, as at Artingale. We shall arrive by the 'Hero' on Friday evening. Could not you manage to breakfast at Farlandstoke on the Saturday?

"Your always affectionate,

"MIRIAM HENNINGTREE."

Both letters were read with pleasure. Mr. Farland was always delighted to have the Henningtrees under his roof, and was on the present occasion especially well pleased to show the experienced and learned architect what had been done at the Castle. Lancaster also was well pleased that his old master should see what he had done, and give him the benefit of his counsel as to what remained still to be accomplished. Nor was he less pleased to see his friend Mrs. Henningtree. He flattered himself that he had so acted as to merit her approval in that part of his conduct which, as he well understood, she was coming to look after, as much as

he had deserved that of her husband in his professional doings.

In the afternoon of the same day which had brought Lancaster the above letter, he received a note with an invitation to breakfast at Farlandstoke on the Saturday morning ; so that the host had himself thoughtfully provided for the meeting desired by his guests.

He was received by Mr. Farland with marked and more than usual cordiality. If the old gentleman had had an opportunity of reading the secrets of Mary Artingale's heart, and had there seen how large a share the young architect had in producing Mary's uncompromising rejection of his son, his reception of him might not perhaps have been so cordial. But Mr. Farland had not as yet by any means realized the notion that there would be any real difficulty in bringing the projected marriage about. And then, again, if he had read Mary's heart to the bottom, he would have seen that had Lancaster never existed, Mary would in all probability have been, if not quite equally, at least quite decidedly averse to looking upon Felix Farland, junior, in the light of a lover.

"Farland has been telling me great things of

your doings at the Castle, Purcell," said Mr. Henningtree, as they sat down to breakfast; "and I need not wait for the testimony of my own eyes to congratulate you; for you could not find a more competent judge in all Europe."

"Come, Henningtree, none of that; I won't hear you talk such nonsense. What do I know of the technical details of the work? I can form some judgment of the effect produced, that is all. For the rest, we amateurs must ever bow to professional knowledge."

"Well, I mean to go over every part of the work to-day, as if I were examining it for a proposing purchaser, and was on the look-out for a flaw. So, my boy, 'if ye have a hole in a' your coats—'"

"I suspect that we need not fear the investigation, eh, Mr. Lancaster?" said Mr. Farland.

"I hope not, sir; I think we are in order. In fact, if we have succeeded in point of taste and style, I think I can answer for the rest."

"I think *we* have succeeded in point of taste," returned the old gentleman, putting an ironical accent on the pronoun.

"Nay, sir, I said 'we' advisedly, I am sure; and Mr. Henningtree will easily believe it, that

I have profited by your advice and suggestions throughout the work."

"And I have other congratulations for you, Purcell," pursued Mr. Henningtree. "I sent some of the drawings you forwarded to me of different parts of the Castle as it is, or was, rather, and as it is to be, up to town, to an old friend of mine, one of the most influential men in the profession. He has shown them about to others, and they have been very greatly admired. I think I can promise you that the fame of the restoration of Artingale Castle will not be confined to Sillshire."

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you?" muttered Lancaster, colouring with pleasure. "I hope," he added, "that all the drawings I sent to Sillchester were not taken for mine."

"No; I observed that some of them were signed 'B. D.' Of course I knew all about B. D. But the drawings have been much admired otherwise than architecturally; and I have been asked who B. D. may be," said Mr. Henningtree.

"By-the-by, how does the proposed publication get on? I think the idea an excellent one, and have no doubt at all that it will answer in a money point of view," said Mr. Farland.

“No doubt about it at all. I have several subscribers’ names, many quite strangers, already,” said Henningtree. “How does the work get on, Purcell?”

“Well, not quite so fast as I could wish, sir,” replied Lancaster. “I have not time to do it all myself, as you may suppose. And my fellow-labourer has not been so industrious as she was at starting. The fact is, sir, that B. D. has had latterly something else to think of. She has not given up, however, altogether; and we are getting on, though slowly.”

“How well I remember that morning, the last of our stay here in the spring,” said Mrs. Henningtree, “observing the way that tall young American stood aside, with all his eyes fixed on the shy little artist, as she was showing us her drawing. I little guessed that the man was then and there falling in love. It is not often that you can catch a man in the very act. Now I shall know another time how a man looks when he is in the very act of falling in love.”

“Beware of hasty generalizations, my dear,” said her husband; “they are the bane of science. Another man may look just as Mr.

what-was-his-name looked when he is in the act of falling out of love. And then you might be exposed to the most fatal blunders."

"I do not think there is any mistake about Mr. Fraser's being in love now, any way," said Mr. Farland. "I met him and little B. D. as I was riding near Woodbine Cottage, the other day. They were too much occupied with each other to see me. But I think I have not forgotten all about such things so entirely as not to be quite certain that the young man was very much in love then. A very excellent match for our little friend B. D., upon my word. I don't wonder she is somewhat less diligent at her drawings."

"You did not see, sir, when you were passing by Woodbine Cottage, whether the captain had returned?" asked Felix.

"No; I don't know. The place was not shut up. But I believe Mr. Fraser is living there; so that shows nothing. Does anybody know where the captain has gone?" said Mr. Farland.

"Gone to visit relatives in London, I fancy, sir. So his old housekeeper says," replied his son.

"First time I ever remember him to have been away since he first settled here, I don't know how many years ago," rejoined Mr. Farland. "Well, now; are you ready for a walk to Artingale, Henningtree? Will you accompany us, ma'am?" added he, turning to Mrs. Henningtree.

"To be sure I will. I want to see what has been done as much as anybody. I will be ready in five minutes," returned the lady.

Felix lounged off to the stables, feeling that his opinion as to the improvements at the Castle was not wanted, and by no means anxious to fall in, as might well happen, with Mary Artingale, in the presence of the assembled party.

The other four started on their walk to the Castle, Mr. Farland and Mr. Henningtree walking together in front, and Mrs. Henningtree following at some little distance with Lancaster.

"Well, Purcell," said the lady, as soon as they were fairly under weigh, "I hope you are contented. You get nothing but praise on all hands—from the lords of the creation at least. It remains to be seen whether I have reason to

be equally satisfied with you. How has the work of restoration been going on inside here?" said Miriam, pointing to the breast of his coat as she spoke.

"I can say very little, I am afraid, about restoration, Mrs. Henningtree," replied he, with a sad smile and a sigh; "but I can affirm that I have consistently kept the resolution which I made in accordance with my own as well as with your opinion, when we last spoke together in the garden of the Moat House."

"Bravo, my good brave boy. The restoration will come about, never fear," said Miriam.

"It has not been an easy task, as you may believe, my friend—to be in constant association with—with them, and to keep such a guard over myself as to make no change in my manner either on the one side or the other. At first on my return from Sillchester I fell into the error of being too distant and reserved to her. She remarked it, taxed me with it, and reproached me for it. And I will confess—for I will not have any secrets from you, my kind friend, on the subject—I confess that I did conceive a suspicion from her manner that I was

not indifferent to her. See how entirely I confide in your friendship, when I dare to make such a confession to you. The suspicion did occur to me. She told me that her drawing was badly done because she had been bothered by Mr. Farland. She went out of her way, as it seemed to me, to tell me that he was disagreeable to her."

"It needed very little telling to know that," said his companion; "of course he is disagreeable to her. I made a bet with Henningtree, when we were here in the spring, that *that* marriage would never come off; not but that Mr. Felix is a very good sort of fellow in his way. But his way is too far away from the way of Mary Artingale. I was quite sure that would never do. But *that* need not be put down to your account in any way. For, as I tell you, it was in the spring, before you were ever at Artingale, that I told Henningtree I was sure it would never be."

"It is an earthenware flower-pot stand matched to one of your Dresden saucers," said Lancaster.

"Yes, much about; though it is a very good flower-pot stand in its proper place," rejoined the lady.

“But there is another matter on which I wanted to speak to you, Mrs. Henningtree ; and as I don’t know when we may have another opportunity, I must make haste and tell you now. Here we are at the church, and we shall be at the Castle in less than ten minutes,” said Lancaster, hanging back a little, so as to avoid re-joining the two gentlemen in front of them, who had stopped in their walk to admire the beautiful range of windows of the Artingale chapel.

“What is it? Not a secret, I hope ; I hate secrets,” said little Mrs. Henningtree.

“You cannot hate them more than I do,” returned the young man ; “but it is a secret, and one which oppressed me painfully just now, when they were talking about Captain Curling’s absence from home. The knowledge of the secret was none of my seeking ; but I know where the captain has gone, and the motive of his absence.”

“Oh, that is a secret, is it? I shouldn’t have thought that it was one that need weigh much upon anybody’s mind. But what on earth can it matter to me where the captain has gone?” said Mrs. Henningtree, not a little surprised.

“You will see that it *is* a secret of some im-

portance. Captain Curling has gone to America, in the hope of being able to learn from Mr. Fraser's grandmother some facts that may lead to a discovery of the truth in the matter we talked about," said Lancaster, in a low voice.

"You don't say so? And who persuaded him to undertake such an expedition? And what interest has he in the matter, one way or the other? And how is it likely that he, of all people in the world, should be likely to find out anything?" asked the lady.

"I think I can say that nobody persuaded him. I most assuredly did not. I have adhered most scrupulously to the advice you and Mr. Henningtree gave me on the subject, and have neither done nor said anything. I have dismissed the matter from my mind as far as it has been possible for me to do so. But Captain Curling, it seems, is not only a friend who has known Fraser from his childhood; he was also the friend of his father, and of his old grandmother. His interest in the matter is one of friendship for them. I had no idea that he was thinking anything more about it. He had never spoken of the subject since the day that Fraser and I first mentioned it to him, which was im-

mediately after the idea had first occurred to me. But it would seem that he had all the time been thinking of it—and to some purpose; for very soon after my return from Sillchester, he told me one day, in great confidence, that he had made up his mind to go and see the old lady, Fraser's grandmother. I represented to him that, even if she had anything of importance to tell, it was little likely that she would tell him what during so many years she had persistently refused to tell her son and her grandson. He, however, thought differently, and had determined to go. Happening to meet me in the fields one day by chance, he told me that he had made up his mind to do so, and started without saying a word to anybody except, of course, to George, the next morning."

"What a brave old fellow! I admire his promptitude, at any rate. But I can hardly suppose that anything is likely to come of it. I can't but think that if the old lady had anything to tell worth telling, she would have told it long ago to her own son. She will hardly be induced to speak now by a comparative stranger," said Mrs. Henningtree, after a short pause passed in thinking of it.

"One would think not. But he seemed very confident that he would get at the knowledge of the facts of the case. It will very soon now be time to expect news of him. His purpose was to be away as short a time as possible. I confess to you, my dear Mrs. Henningtree, that I cannot help feeling nervous as to the upshot," said Lancaster, with an anxious look into his companion's face.

"Nervous! Yes, indeed, I should feel very nervous, if I were not so thoroughly persuaded that nothing will come of it. And as for you, my dear Purcell, bearing in mind the nature of the interest the solution of the mystery may be supposed to have in your eyes, my strong advice is that you should dismiss the matter from your mind as far as possible. Do not dwell on possibilities which might or might not arise, were a very improbable event to fall out," said Mrs. Henningtree, with kind and affectionate eagerness.

"I do not. Believe me, I have dismissed the matter from my mind. Do not imagine, my dear friend, that I am looking forward to such a catastrophe with hope. I should despise myself for such baseness. I should not have re-

curred to the subject at all, had it not been that I did not like, after the conversation we had had, to have a secret from you in the matter. It was very disagreeable to me not to be able to say that I knew where old Captain Curling had gone, and what for, when they were talking about it at the breakfast-table just now," said Lancaster.

They reached the entrance to the Castle as he finished speaking. Sir Hildebrand met them in the hall as they entered, and the whole party at once proceeded to the part of the Castle which was under repair, where the rest of the morning was very satisfactorily passed in reviewing what had been done, and deciding on what yet remained to be accomplished.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS HATHAWAY PLAYS A WINNING GAME.

AFTER a long morning thus spent, the party walked down the slope in front of the great terrace, for the purpose of judging of the effect of a group of ornamental chimneys, which Lancaster proposed raising, as seen in combination with the general outline of the building. And being thus far on their way towards the church and the village, they strolled onwards in the direction of Farlandstoke, instead of returning to the Castle. This time, Mrs. Henningtree walked on in front with Sir Hildebrand and Mr. Farland, while Mr. Henningtree took Lancaster's arm, and followed them at a little distance.

"Purcell, I am proud of you. I am proud of my pupil," said Mr. Henningtree. "I am

indeed, my boy. You have executed a very difficult task in a style that any architect in the kingdom might be proud of."

"Oh, Mr. Henningtree——"

"You know very well how far I should be likely to say one word more than I thought in praise of your work. No, you may trust me, Purcell. That is a great work, and one which deserves to open—and I have little doubt will open—to you the path to the highest places in our profession. I have been speaking to Farland about writing a paper on the subject to be read next spring at the Antiquaries' Society. He is just the man to do it, and he likes the idea. I am preparing a little memoir myself, for our Sillchester printing society."

"My dear friend, how can I sufficiently thank you?" said Lancaster, much gratified, and colouring up with pleasure.

"By going on as you have begun, my boy; and by not forgetting, by-and-by, when you are a great man in London, that you were a pupil of old Henningtree of Sillchester. But now I want to say one word on another matter. Miriam found a moment while we were in the Castle to whisper in my ear what you had told

her about Captain Curling. Depend upon it, Lancaster, the poor old gentleman has gone on a wild-goose chase. Be very sure there is nothing in it. I think, mind you, that it is very likely that the late Sir George Artingale had some woman on his hands, when he was about to be married to the Earl of Foxley's daughter; very likely that he considered it expedient to rid himself of her by sending her off to the colonies; and not at all improbable that this George Fraser may be the grandson of the woman so sent. But what I do *not* think likely is that there was any marriage in the case. It is in itself extremely improbable. Such men as Sir George Artingale make victims of poor girls unhappy enough to have pleased their eye; but they do not marry them. But that is not all. I have not only thought a good deal about the matter; I have very cautiously and quietly made some inquiries. The firm who had the management—and, indeed, still have—of the affairs of the Earl of Foxley, are Sillchester people, whom I have known intimately all my life. You know them well enough—Slowcome and Sligo, in the High Street. Now, I took an opportunity the other day of having some talk

with Slowcome—old Slow, as we call him—about old times; and led him round to speak of the marriage of the Lady Geraldine with Sir George Artingale. He remembered it well, and all about it. He was not old Slow in those days, his father was then the head of the firm; he was young Slow, then; but he was just as *sure* as ever, and the old man was just such another slow and sure. Do you think they would not have smelt a rat, if there had been any rat to smell? The more so that they would have been glad enough to throw any impediment in the way of the marriage if they could have done so. For the Slowcomes knew well what Sir George was; and knew what sort of a lot awaited the poor Lady Geraldine. They are good people, the Slowcomes. No, no; if there had been anything of the sort, old Slow would have ferreted it out, you may swear. He remembered something about the sending off a woman to the colonies. But bigamy. Pooh! pooh! Be very sure, my dear boy, that the captain has made his voyage to America for nothing.”

“It is very likely. Probably, you may be right, sir. It is very probable, most probable,

perhaps, that you are so. I assure you, I have thought no more about it since I was at Sillchester, except when Captain Curling confided to me his intention. And then I told him that I thought he would do no good," said Lancaster.

"Besides, my view of the case would explain the obstinate silence of the old lady," added Mr. Henningtree.

"No doubt, no doubt. We shall have the captain home again directly. He may be here any day," said the younger man.

"Well, then, we shall see—or rather, we shall most likely see nothing except that the captain has had his voyage for his pains. Are you coming in?" asked Henningtree, as they reached the entrance to the Farlandstoke domain.

"No ; I will stroll back again to the Castle. I want to see some of the men," said Lancaster ; and Mr. Henningtree followed the others of the party into the house alone.

In the meantime Félix, having escaped the walk to Artingale in the morning, and got through as many hours as he could by sauntering about the stables, and giving directions to the groom, which had a continual tendency to become conversations, had lounged out into

the village, just in time not to fall in with the party returning from the Castle. He was not in the happiest frame of mind, or on the best terms with himself. He felt, in the first place, that he was shirking his duty. He ought to have gone with the others to Artingale, and have made it an opportunity for seeing Mary. But the fact was that he was beginning to get very tired of the task assigned to him. As far as he could see, he made no progress in his suit at all. Mary had been, if anything, less gracious to him of late than ever. To be sure, she certainly was uncommonly beautiful, and—and—in fact, a tip-topper in every sense of the word. It certainly did seem that a marriage between Artingale and Farlandstoke, situated as the two families were, would be the properest thing imaginable. And it would be a monstrous fine thing to be master of Artingale—and unquestionably a monstrous fine thing to be the husband of Mary Artingale. There was nothing like her in those parts. That was unquestionable. But it really did seem uncommonly as if Mary did not mean anything of the sort. He would have given a trifle to see her and that fellow Lancaster together, just to see the

style of her behaviour to *him*. Perhaps it might be that Mary was so coy and—and—so uncomfortable-like with him, *because* she was going to be his wife. It might be the way with girls. There was no saying. But, in the meantime, it did begin to seem to Felix that the part he was required to play in the matter was not only a very unpleasant, but a somewhat ridiculous one.

He was revolving all these thoughts discontentedly enough in his mind, as he sauntered along a lane that fell into what was dignified by the name of the High Street of Billiford, just at the bottom of the town, where there was a bridge over the little river in the place of the whilom ford which had given its name to the place, when just by the bridge he met his friend and confidante, Miss Lucy Hathaway.

And mighty pretty she looked, in her light summer muslin, with cherry-coloured ribbons, and broad-leafed straw hat of the Watteau shepherdess fashion, with its long ribbons of the same colour. And very bright the black eyes gleamed out from under it. And very light and elastic, and at the same time firm, was the tread of the small, well-formed foot and straight, springy ankle, as she came tripping along the

pavement. And very bright the smile, and very pleasant the gleam of the small white teeth which shone out as she said, on meeting him—

“La! Mr. Felix, who would have thought of meeting you here at this time o’ day? It is not often that one sees you in town so early—’specially of late,” she added, with a little sigh. “I’ve known the time when you’d come down before breakfast to make up a nutting party. But those times are all over. And one has something else to think of than nutting, now o’ days.”

“*I* have, more’s the pity,” said Felix, who had taken both her hands in his, as he met her face to face, and was still standing so, looking straight into her eyes; “*I* have, more’s the pity. But you look as ready for a nutting frolic as ever, Lucy; and you look as if you would like it as well as ever.”

“Wouldn’t I, that’s all. But, Lord bless me, duty is duty, and work is work. And as I said, I’ve something else to think of. But I don’t see why *you* should not go a nutting all day long, if you had a mind to, Mr. Felix, or anything else you liked better.”

“But I’ve no mind to go nutting by myself, or I might gather all the nuts in the forest, for that matter. But what stops you from doing as you please? Work, indeed! I dare say,” said Felix, shaking his head at her?

“Well, it *is* work—trotting about after the poor people from morning till night. Do you think I should not like better to do something else than what I am doing now?”

“What, talking to me? I should not wonder, Lucy,” said Felix, in a tone that very plainly indicated that his words were only uttered for the sake of the rejoinder they were calculated to produce, and which might, perhaps, have been held to indicate, further, that he was decidedly oblivious for the moment of the work he ought to have been doing at Artingale Castle.

“No, not that,” said Lucy, with a slight blush and a dropping of her eyes beneath their long black lashes, after a fashion that made Felix long there and then to steal a kiss; “no, not that, as you know very well, Mr. Felix. That is what I *am* doing, but what I ought to be doing is going to see after old Mrs. Boldershaw, who lives at Stratton End—a three miles’ walk. She is always bothering papa, and he knows

there is nothing much the matter with her. And he could not manage to bring Stratton End into his round to-day, and so he asked me to walk over and see the old woman, and tell her that he will come to her to-morrow or next day. So that's *my* work, and I must go and do it," said Lucy, withdrawing her hands from those of her companion.

"Well, there is no great hardship, that I can see, in a walk to Stratton End such a morning as this. I should like such a walk myself, nothing better," said Felix.

"*Nothing* better, Mr. Felix?" said Lucy, with an arch smile, and a glance out of the corner of her eye.

"No, nothing better, if it were to be done now directly," said Felix, with a glance that proved that the want of book-learning did not incapacitate him from doing a little stroke of flirtation neatly enough, when the flirtée was reasonably well adapted to the flirtor.

Lucy coloured with pleasure, and looked ten times prettier than ever in doing so. "If that is really true," she said, "I do not see why you should not do as you like. I must be going, any how."

And Felix turned to accompany her. He was proud of the neat way in which he had performed this little bit of gallantry; and the thought occurred to him at the moment, "Why cannot I do that with Mary Artingale? Why can't I make *her* colour, and smile, and seem pleased and flattered? Why do I speak to her as if I was a schoolboy saying his lesson—or rather like one who can't say his lesson—to a schoolmaster? Probably, because Mary knows as much as a schoolmaster. Any way, it does seem like a sign that we were not meant for each other."

"The fact is, Lucy," he continued, "I did want to have a little talk with you. We are such old friends, you know. I may open my heart to you, may I not? It is such a comfort to have somebody one can speak to."

"I am sure, Mr. Felix, it would be a great pleasure to me if I could be a comfort to you, as you say, in any way. We always *were* friends in the dear old days. Heigho!" and here Lucy sighed again—not so slight a sigh as the former one. And there was a corresponding change in her manner. It was no longer the brisk, cheery tone in which she had spoken while they were

standing together on the pavement by the bridge at the foot of the street of the town. They had now turned into a quite countrified lane, and perhaps the change of scene produced a corresponding change in Lucy's mind. She was now "roaming with him thro' forests green," and was no longer under the eye of the "dull, cold world" of the Billiford High Street.

"Yes; they were pleasant days. But then, as you said, Lucy, duty comes, and one has to do one's duty. And you know the duty that has been cut out for me. And mind you, I do consider that Mary Artingale is the first lady in all the country in every respect. She is wonderfully clever, very handsome, and by all accounts as good as gold—a regular tip-topper, I call her. But somehow or other we don't get on together."

"If you came with me to tell me all about Miss Artingale's good qualities, I think it was hardly worth while; for I can hear of them any day. No doubt she is very good, and wonderfully clever, they say; as for beautiful, that is matter of opinion and taste, you know, Mr. Felix." said Lucy, pretending to pout, rather

than feeling anything that made her do so in reality. She had got her game to play, and was playing it. There was no question in her mind about Mary Artingale's beauty, or her own. Naturally she thought, as some people would have agreed with her in thinking, that she, Lucy, was the prettier of the two. But what was more to the purpose was that she had not the smallest doubt that Felix thought so too, or that at any rate he preferred her beauty to that of Miss Artingale, and that if he were only free to do just as he liked, she, and nobody else, would be Mrs. Farland of Farlandstoke—and a very good, loving, and happy wife into the bargain. But Felix was not free to do as he liked; nor, as Lucy supposed, was Miss Artingale; and the end to be attained was to induce him to rebel against the tyranny which would make him marry against his own fancy.

“Now don't talk in that way, Lucy. Of course we all know that Miss Artingale is—is, in fact, a tip-topper, as I said. And you know that it is the wish of my father and of her father that she and I should be married. It would be a very good thing for both the estates and the families, and all that sort of thing. Of course it would.

You know all about it. But what I wanted to say is, that Miss Artingale and I don't seem to get on together; it don't seem as if we were a bit nearer being married than we were when I began."

"Began what, Mr. Felix?" asked Lucy, accepting the arm he offered her, for they were now quite among the forests green, and the path in the rut-furrowed lane was rough enough to afford an excuse for the civility.

"Why, began—began to offer to her, of course," said Felix, a little tartly.

"Began to offer to her, Mr. Felix? Why, that is a thing generally begun and finished at one time, as I have understood," said Lucy, with a little laugh.

"For those that are lucky at it, I suppose it is," said Felix, with a deep sigh; "but for those that ain't, it takes a long time."

"I should have thought, Mr. Felix, that it would have been the first way with you," said Lucy, hanging her head, and speaking very low. She had to look down at the path, probably, for just at the same moment the inequalities of it caused her to press a little heavier on the arm of her companion. "I should

not have fancied," she added, "that *you* would have had to ask twice."

"But, indeed, I have had to ask half a dozen times, and I don't seem a bit nearer getting a 'yes' now than at first. My father says that all goes for nothing, and that I must stick to it. But, upon my soul, Lucy, I am getting pretty well tired of it."

"What a strange girl she must be," said Lucy, with another very plaintive sigh, and shaking her head mournfully.

"Well, I think she is strange, and that is the truth of it; I do not understand her, for my part," said Felix.

"What does she say when you speak to her on the subject, Mr. Felix?—you are not angry with me for asking such a question?" asked Lucy, with an eager look into his eyes.

"Angry, my dear girl, angry with you?" and here Lucy was conscious that her arm was very decidedly pressed by that on which she was leaning. And she immediately scored up in her mind three on her side towards the game. "It is just what I want to tell you. I want to know what I am to think of it. You know girls' ways better than I do—of course you do.

I want you to tell me what you think she really means," said Felix.

"What does she say to you?" repeated Lucy.

"Says that it can never be—that I must put anything of the sort out of my head—that she can never have any other answer to give me—that my pursuit of her is very painful to her—that she does not feel, and never can feel, any affection for me," said Felix, pouring into his friend's ear all the rebuffs he had had to suffer.

"She must be a thoroughly heartless girl, whatever else she may be; she must be utterly heartless," murmured Lucy, softly.

"But what does she mean?" urged Felix: "is 'no' to be 'no' with her?"

"I should say that there was very little doubt as to what she means," said Lucy, in a tone of disgust.

"And what *does* she mean, pray? for I will be hanged if I can make out," said Felix.

"She means that she will not be Mrs. Felix Farland," replied Lucy, with decision.

"But I told her that the name should be Farland-Artingale—I told her that very distinctly," rejoined Felix.

"She means that, let the name be what it

may, she will have nothing to say to you," said Lucy, brusquely, as if provoked by the "heartlessness" which could show itself in such a manner.

"And you think she really means that in earnest?" said Felix, by no means in a tone of despair. "My father," he added, "thinks otherwise."

"You may trust me, Mr. Felix. She don't mean to accept you now or ever. Clever as she may be, she has not the good sense to know happiness when it is offered to her. I've no patience with such girls," said Lucy, as if the last words were said mainly to herself.

"If I thought you were right—" said Felix, thoughtfully.

"Look here, Mr. Felix, I could tell you something, if I was sure I could trust you—something that makes me quite sure I am right in what I say," said Lucy, looking at him eagerly.

"Oh, you know you may trust me, Lucy; what is it?" said Farland.

"Well, for old friendship sake, I don't mind telling you," said Lucy: "but you must promise not to say a word to anybody; you promise me? It must be quite a secret between us two."

“Quite so; you know you can trust me, Lucy,” said Felix.

“I know I can, dear Mr. Felix,” said Lucy, with a little gush of enthusiasm. “And then I have been longing so just to whisper a word in your ear; I can’t bear to see you so hoodwinked and put upon; you are too frank, too good and honourable to suspect others; I have seen it all, and it has made my blood boil. For I—well, never mind *my* feelings, we won’t talk about them; listen—” here Lucy drew very close to her companion’s side, and dropping her voice to a mysterious whisper, continued: “the truth is, that while she has been playing fast and loose with you, Mary Artingale has been, and *is*, in love with that young Lancaster, the architect.”

“No, you don’t mean it?” cried Felix, in a tone denoting much interest and surprise, but not a trace of dismay, anger, or sorrow. “You don’t mean it, Lucy?”

“Trust a woman’s eyes, Mr. Felix; if it is not as I tell you, call me a fool,” returned Lucy.

“By Jove! won’t there be a considerable quantity of fat in the fire, if that’s the game.

But I say, Lucy dear" (Lucy here scored another point towards the game on the marking-board of her mind), "fair play is a jewel; she has never played fast and loose with me. By Jove! it's been all loose with her from the beginning, and no mistake," said Felix, whose sense of honour would not allow him to hear Mary accused of conduct of which he well knew she had never been guilty.

"Any way she has been carrying on with Mr. Lancaster as sly as a fox, pretty nearly ever since he has been here. I have watched her, and it made my blood boil, as I say, to see her making a fool of you all the time. Why could she not have told you the truth? Ah, Mr. Felix, if she had known as well as some others how to tell the solid gold from the tinsel, why, it would have been better for her, that's all," said Lucy, looking down on the ground.

"And perhaps not so well for me," said Felix, administering a pressure to the arm that was lying on his.

Lucy immediately scored six, and began seriously to think that with a little patience and careful play the game might be her own.

"That is as you may think, dear Mr. Felix.

For my part," continued Lucy, after a pause, "it has always been my notion that the best chance for happiness in marriage is where people knew each other, and knew that they liked each other, and were suited to each other, in the old simple days before either of them ever began to think of marrying or giving in marriage."

There was a biblical savour about the last phrase, which to the mind of Felix imparted to the entire sentiment a halo of truthful candour, and an element of goodness and high moral feeling that commanded his complete adhesion. He was not sure whether the entire sentence were not a quotation from Holy Writ. And a vague impression was produced dimly in his mind, that in marrying Lucy Hathaway he should be in sort acting like the patriarch who served seven years for Rachel, and that he should be thereby doing a pious and holy thing accordingly.

"Dear Lucy," he murmured, "how good and kind you are! And as for cleverness, if you haven't as much cleverness in your little finger—I know nothing about it, that's all."

"Ah, dear Mr. Felix." Lucy was tempted to

say, *dear Felix* ; but she remembered how often she had heard her father, who was an enthusiastic fly-fisher, tell how many a fish had been lost by too great impatience in trying to hook him, and refrained ; “ Dear Mr. Felix, I am but a silly young girl ; but out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh, you know.”

“ It does indeed, dear Lucy,” sighed her companion, again pressing her arm with unmistakeable tenderness.

There was not much meaning in the first three words, but there was in the last two. And the pressure of the arm was more eloquent still. And Lucy scored again. Her mark was rapidly creeping up on the board ; and there was no saying how much she might have pushed it on towards the winning point, when her sharp eye caught sight of a horseman at a considerable distance in the lane coming towards them.

“ There is Mr. Farland, riding,” said she, with a very perceptibly altered voice and manner.

And surely enough it was the old gentleman, on his favourite cob, which he had mounted for his afternoon ride, as soon as he had returned

from the Castle. He had cantered across a common which lay between Farlandstoke and Stratton End; and was now riding leisurely home by the lanes, through Billiford.

“Where?” said Felix, sharply.

“There, coming this way. Don’t you see his hat above the hedge?”

“Well, I think I must be going back. There is no use you know——”

“None at all; good morning. Good bye.”

“Good bye, dear Lucy. We will talk more another time.” And in the hurry of this sudden parting Felix seized Lucy’s small and pretty, though not very white hand, and pressed it to his lips.

“Yes, yes, another time. Good bye, dear Felix.”

Lucy was not too much hurried or flurried to forget to move on her mental marker; or to calculate that the last demonstration on the part of her companion decidedly justified the *dear Felix* now.

The young man turned back, and was suddenly so strongly impressed with a sense of the value of time, that he started homewards at a very quick pace, which shortly became a spring across

the hedge into a field, and a run across country by the shortest cut to Farlandstoke.

Lucy, on her side, walked slowly and demurely on till she met Mr. Farland, and then detained him as long as she could with an account of her mission to old Mrs. Boldershaw, and a succinct view of that lady's symptoms; to all which Mr. Farland listened with unfailing patience and courtesy.

Lancaster, meantime, on declining to remain at Farlandstoke with the rest of the party, had gone up to his own room at the cottage for a moment, as he passed it on his way back to the Castle, and had found a letter lying on his table, which had just arrived. The London letters were brought to Billiford by a cross-country cart, which ran between a town on the great Sillchester road and the little market town in the northernmost part of the county, and arrived at the latter place at mid-day.

The handwriting was unknown to Lancaster. The letter bore the London postmark. Lancaster had no correspondent in the metropolis, as far as he knew, and he opened the letter with some curiosity. It was written in a large, bold, and somewhat laboured hand; and ran as follows:—

“Port of London. On board the
“Good Ship ‘Corinthian,’

“AND, DEAR MR. LANCASTER,

“A good ship she is. We have made a splendid run of fourteen days nineteen hours. But then I’ve a notion they build these clippers finer than they did. I’m not so sure they’d behave so well in heavy weather as the old barkies used to. They sail nearer the wind, too, that must be allowed. I consider Captain Simsbury to be a first-rate seaman, and shall always say so. But, between you and me, and in strict confidence, I think that he carried on in a fog off the banks a trifle more than prudence and good seamanship warranted. However, all’s well as ends well. And our voyage has ended very well.

“Yours obediently to command,

“GILES CURLING.

“P.S.—I was nearly forgetting to mention that I shall be at Woodbine Cottage with somebody about one o’clock post meridian, on Tuesday.”

It was on Monday that the letter reached Billiford.

BOOK VI.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS ARE VISITED ON
THE CHILDREN.

CHAPTER I.

“SOMEBODY” ARRIVES AT WOODBINE COTTAGE.

ON reading the letter which has been given at the close of the last book, Lancaster changed his intention of returning to the Castle, and hurried off to Woodbine Cottage, which he reached in time to catch Fraser there at his early dinner. The captain's epistle was most unsatisfactorily mysterious. Had he or had he not done anything or found out anything respecting the matter which had induced him to make the voyage? Not a word on the subject. He had had time to write criticisms on the captain's seamanship, but no word on the important interests

hanging on his journey. And what on earth did he mean by having "somebody" with him? Lancaster hoped that Fraser would have received some more satisfactory tidings.

George had indeed received a letter from the captain by the same post which had brought that for Lancaster. But it was almost a second copy of the letter he had already read. To Fraser also the captain said that he should bring "somebody" with him.

"Have *you* any idea what he means?" asked Lancaster.

"Not a bit. How should I? There's the old boy's letter. You can see what he says," replied Fraser, taking the captain's missive out of his pocket. "It is pretty clear that he has nothing special to tell us. As to his somebody, I suppose he wants to have a bed got ready at the cottage. Some friend he has made on his travels, I suppose. The captain, like enough. Captain Simsbury, he calls him. I think I have heard the name in the trade. I dare say Captain Simsbury, of the good ship 'Corinthian,' has been able to get away for a day or two before breaking bulk, and Curling has persuaded him to take a run down to the cottage."

“But how does he mean to get here at one o’clock?” rejoined Lancaster. “The coach that comes across from Yeoton does not get here till the evening. And the mail-cart can take, I fancy, but one passenger, and that gets here at mid-day.”

“Perhaps the old gentleman means to do the thing in style, and post it,” said the other.

“Any way, I shall be at the Artingale Arms on the look out for him, at one o’clock, as he says,” returned Lancaster, “or better, perhaps, at mid-day,” he added; “who knows but he may come by the mail-cart, after all? It may be possible to take two in it, for aught I know.”

“Well, I will be at the inn at noon. We will meet there, unless it would be better for me to call for you at the cottage, and go together,” said Fraser.

“No, I shall be busy at the Castle, and will get away in time to be at the Artingale Arms by twelve. But you can call at the cottage all the same, though you won’t find me there,” said Lancaster, smiling at his friend’s plan for getting an interview with his sweetheart on the plea of coming to call for him.

On the next day the two young men did meet

at the Artingale Arms, as settled, at midday, and saw the mail-cart duly arrive, bringing one passenger with it. But that passenger was not the captain; nor could the driver, who, like all the other inhabitants of Billiford, knew the captain perfectly well, give them any tidings of him. So they had to remain for the next hour, getting through the time as best they might, in that most disagreeable of all earthly employments, waiting.

At last it struck one from Billiford steeple, and the two watchers, faithfully at their post at the Artingale Arms as the hour struck, had the advantage of an opportunity of observing how many of the inhabitants sent for their dinner-beer to the tap of the Artingale Arms. But other fruit their watch brought them not. Between one and twenty minutes past one they looked at their watches about forty times; and at last gave it up, coming to the conclusion that the captain's boasted punctuality was a sea-going quality only, and that he had been altogether thrown out by an attempt to calculate time and space on shore.

At twenty minutes after one they gave him up, and returned together to Woodbine Cottage,

while Lancaster explained to his companion the reasons, which had had so much weight in his own mind, for thinking it very improbable that the captain should have been able to do anything to any purpose in America—a conclusion in which he found Fraser fully prepared to agree with him.

Now while the two young men had been looking at the Billiford parlour-maids coming to the Artingale Arms for the daily beer of the inhabitants thereof, and had been accusing Captain Curling of want of punctuality and general blunder-headedness, with that too great proclivity to convict the members of the generation preceding their own of imbecility and old-fogyism, which is apt to characterise human nature on the sunny side of thirty, the old sailor, true to his calculation as old time, had arrived at Woodbine Cottage, as he said he would, at one o'clock. The cottage, it must be explained, could be reached by a carriage coming from Yeoton without passing through, and more directly than by passing through, Billiford, by a certain lane, which thus saved about half a mile. Thus it came to pass that when Lancaster and Fraser reached the cottage,

they found the captain and another individual comfortably seated in the little dining-room, discussing the remains of Fraser's dinner of the previous day.

"Why, captain," cried Fraser, "we have been on the look out for you at the Artingale Arms."

"Ah! you looked out to the starboard, and t'other craft passed on the larboard," returned the captain, chuckling; "but you should mind your signals better. I never said anything about the Artingale Arms. I said I would arrive at the cottage at one; and I did arrive at one, didn't I, Mr. Williams?"

"Punctually at one to the minute, sir," returned the gentleman thus addressed; "I can give that in evidence."

"But how did you get here, captain?" said Lancaster. "We thought that maybe you'd come by the mail-cart."

"Mail-cart be hanged. Chartered a craft of my own from Yeoton, *and* here we are."

Yes, it was plain that there they were. But, in the absence of anything to indicate who "we" were, the young men felt that they could not ask for any of the news they were so

anxious to hear. Fraser, however, could at least ask after his relatives at home.

“Well,” said he, “and how did you leave them all at Salem?”

“Who—them?” asked the captain, pursuing his occupation of punishing the cold meat and bread before him.

“Why, grandmother, to be sure. How is the dear old soul? Did you make her understand rightly what has kept me away so long?”

“She understands it as rightly as I do, George, which is not saying much. But I did not leave her at Salem at all,” said the captain, choking himself with the competition between his food and a laugh.

“Not leave her at Salem! Why, where the deuce is she, then?” cried George, in much surprise.

“Upstairs,” said the captain, pointing with his knife to the ceiling as he spoke.

“Upstairs! What, in this house?” cried Fraser, springing to his feet.

“Yes, in this house—unless she has escaped up the chimney, for there is no other way out,” said the captain.

Fraser turned to rush out of the room, and

was already at the door when the captain stopped him.

“Stop a minute, lad; look to your soundings before you steer stem on on to an unknown coast in that fashion. Don’t frighten the old lady out of her wits; easy does it. If you will let me take a drink of ale to wash my beef down with, I will go up with you. There, that will do,” said the old man, setting his glass on the table, after a long pull at the ale tankard: “now then, come along. And mind you let me go into action first; and do you look to me for signals all through.”

And so saying he led George up to the best spare room of the cottage; and having first discreetly tapped with his knuckles, put his head in, and said, by way of breaking it to the old woman gently that her grandson was there outside the door, “Mrs. Fraser, here is a young gentleman as I think you have seen afore, is a-wanting to pay you a visit.”

And in the next instant the old woman and her grandson were in each other’s arms.

She was not a very old woman for her years, and was neither feeble nor infirm. But she was very much overcome by the emotions which

the events that had befallen her, and the step she had been prevailed upon to take, were naturally calculated to occasion. She was a rather small, slender figure, neatly dressed in black silk, with a close white cap above the braids of her scarcely less white hair. And any one who had seen her, as Mr. Julius Harding had seen her in the little Scotch lodging-house in the heart of the city, when, some half-century ago, he had gone to her thither to persuade her to consent to leave England, might still have recognized the delicately cut features which had made the refined beauty of the young Scotch-woman, who was there and then known as Mrs. Melville.

“Why, granny, how, in the name of fortune, did it ever come into your head to think of shipping for the old country?” said her grandson, as soon as their mutual pleasure at meeting had been expressed on either side.

“Well, George, it was much the same way that I took it into my head, as you say, once before to sail for the new country—just ’cause I was over-persuaded. But this time I think it was a true friend that persuaded me, though I am not so sure about the wisdom o’t.”

"That is to be seen," said Captain Curling, who had been standing in the little bay window of the room, looking on with a pleased smile, while the grandmother and grandson had been embracing; "that is to be seen. Any way, it is true I did persuade your granny to ship with me for old England. For, *in* the first place, George, you are the grandson of Sir George Artingale, as sure as that is Artingale church-steeple there, as you can see out of this window."

"No! you don't say that?" said George, becoming very red in the face.

"But I do say just that, and nothing else. Our friend Lancaster downstairs there, hit the right nail on the head as true as gospel."

Mrs. Fraser—so to call her, for still a little while—had pulled out her pocket-handkerchief, and covering her eyes with it, was rocking herself to and fro in her chair.

"Tell ye how I did it," continued the captain: "I knew well enough that if I had begun asking questions, I should ha' got no more answers than ever you or your father got. So in I walks into the old cottage without either by your leave or with your leave, and says I to

your grandmother, 'Lady Artingale,' says I, 'you're a-wanted on the quarter-deck by the captain,' says I. Next moment I was afraid I had killed her; I was, upon my life, George! for the poor dear old lady fell for'ard out of her chair as if she was shot. It is true, ma'am, isn't it?" said the captain, appealing to his old friend, who nodded her head silently, while still holding her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Howsoever," continued the captain, "I brought her to; and the cat was out of the bag. It was Sir George Artingale that was the father of your father, George, and that sent her, his lawful wife, as I believe, out of the country; or persuaded her to go, any way. He married her, or pretended to marry her in Scotland. I believe he did marry her. So does that chap downstairs—a lawyer he is, much recommended for 'cuteness—Williams his name is. She, poor soul, always believed that she was married true and lawful; but then how to prove it, that was the question. They made her believe that she could not prove it, any how. And then when she did make up her mind to give it all up, and go away for ever, she determined that it should be for ever; and so, you see, on settling in

America, the more completely to cut off all the old moorings, she dropped the name under which they had sent her out, and took her mother's maiden name of Fraser. "Ain't I a-telling the story right as it was, my old friend?" said the captain, turning kindly to the old lady.

"Yes, Captain Curling, so it was," said she, with a deep sigh; "and little did I think ever again in this world to answer to any other name than that my mother answered to before she knew sorrow or trouble or wrong; but you startled it out of me."

"I did *so*, my old friend—for the good of you and your boy, here; *and* that right might be done," said the captain; "but, says you," he continued, turning to Fraser, "how are you going to prove that this marriage really was a marriage, after all? I'll tell you, my boy; and the lawyer chap downstairs—he was recommended to me by the old firm of my owners; so you see, I went to work in a shipshape sort of a manner—the lawyer, I say, can tell you better than I can. When I came to study the bearings and the eddies and currents, as a man may say, of that ere old woman's conduct and ways and behaviour at the cottage—she as lived

servant with Sir George Artingale, I mean—I feel sure that she knows all about it. And lawyer Williams, he thinks so too. Now, as things has turned out, if so be as you are Sir George Artingale, owner of Artingale Castle——”

“Come, captain,” interrupted Fraser, “that is coming it rather too strong. I, Sir George Artingale! Why, what would my own owners say, seeing I’m rated as George Fraser on the ship’s books?”

“Never you mind your owners; this cruise is on your own bottom. I say you are Sir George Artingale. And what I was going to say—only you put it all out of my head, a interrupting me—I was going to say—oh!—I know—if so be as I am given to understand, little Bertha Donne is likely to become Lady Artingale in consequence of her grandmother speaking out the truth, why that may be a motive for the old lady to tell the truth. That’s one thing. But I don’t mean to trust to that. I mean to take the old woman as I took my old friend here—by surprise. It is a terrible thing to be brought to in a minute, all standing; and it’ll be worse for old Hannah than it was for

your grandmother, George ; for it will be eyesight as well as hearing. She never thinks to see the poor Scotch lassie that she helped to deceive any more in this world. And I mean that she should see her, all of a heap too—and that no later than this afternoon. We must not allow time for it to get about that I brought back an elderly female with me from America. We must be down upon her at once.”

“How be down upon her?” asked Fraser.

“Go to the cottage without a word of warning, and walk in upon her without your leave or by your leave, to be sure,” replied the captain.

“What, grandmother?” said Fraser.

“To be sure ; that’s what she has come all the way from America to do—just that, and nothing else. We will go down, you and I, ma’am, quiet and easy, and have it all done and settled in an hour from now,” said the irrepressible captain.

“What do you say, grandmother?” said Fraser, tenderly, to the old woman, who sat slowly rocking herself to and fro in her chair.

“Well, Geordie, what is to be said ? I came, as the captain says, from America to do this—over-persuaded by him—and now I am here the

sooner it is done the better. I remember Hannah Campbell well enough. It remains to be seen whether she will recognize me. When must we go, captain? I'm ready," said the old woman.

In the meantime, Lancaster and Mr. Williams the lawyer—a younger member of an eminent firm, to whom the captain had been recommended, as he said, by his former owners—had got into conversation; and the latter had explained to Lancaster the bearing of the case, as they appeared to him, from what he had been able to gather from the captain's statements, and from Mrs. Fraser's declarations and recollections, and his own reasons for thinking that there was considerable probability that they might be able to establish his client's right to the title and estates of Artingale. "Everything depended," he said, "on what the old woman Campbell might be able and willing to prove." And he strongly recommended that Fraser should abstain from accompanying the captain and his grandmother on their visit to the cottage; because since, as he understood, there was likely to be a marriage between him and Hannah Campbell's granddaughter, it was desirable that the latter

should recognize Mrs. Fraser, and give her testimony without knowing that there was any connection between her and the man who was engaged to her granddaughter, in order that no suspicion of a possibly interested motive might rest upon the evidence.

And it was decided that this advice should be acted upon. Lancaster was invited to accompany the party to the cottage, in case it might thereafter turn out to be desirable to have independent testimony to any words that Hannah Campbell might utter. And so the little party of four set forth to walk to the cottage in Artin-gale Park, Mrs. Fraser on the captain's arm, and Lancaster and lawyer Williams following them.

CHAPTER II.

THE CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE.

WHEN the party reached the cottage, there was nothing to prevent them from walking in without either by your leave or with your leave, as the captain had phrased it. They had but to raise the latch and enter. They did so, and found Bertha sitting at one of the windows of the outer kitchen, at a little table with her drawing things. I think that she probably looked out of the windows to see who was coming up the path oftener than was good for her drawing. And so looking up she had seen the captain and his companions; but not being able to guess what such a party could be coming to the cottage for, had concluded that they were not going to do so, but would pass along the path towards the Castle.

Greatly, therefore, was she surprised when she saw the four, two of whom were totally unknown to her, enter the kitchen.

“Beg pardon, Miss Bertha,” said the captain, “hope we are not disturbing you; but I have brought an old friend to see your grandmother. Is she in her room?”

“Yes, Captain Curling, she is in her room; I will call her; who shall I tell her wishes to see her?” said Bertha.

“Oh, never mind that, tell her that I want to speak to her—with Captain Curling’s compliments—and should be much obliged if she would come into the kitchen.”

So Bertha went into the old woman’s room, and presently returned, leading her in on her arm.

“Lord ’a marcy!” cried old Hannah, when she saw how many people there were in the kitchen. But she turned to place herself in her accustomed arm-chair without having as yet recognized anybody. As soon as she had seated herself in her usual corner near the window, and had so got the light well on the group, who were still standing near the door by which they had entered, she put up her hand to shade

her eyes, and in the next instant turned deadly pale, and began to shake all over.

“Who is it?” she cried, in a cracked treble voice. “Who is it? and what do you come here for, all of ye?”

“Don’t you know who this lady is, Mrs. Campbell?” said the captain. “I think you know her—she knows you very well, though it is a long time since you met last at Crossmyloof, near Glasgow. But that was an occasion, you know, that ladies are apt to remember.”

“Crossmyloof! Jessie Carrington. Be it her ghost?” said the old woman, in a hoarse whisper, stretching out her shaking hands towards her visitor, who stood, herself hardly less moved, leaning on the captain’s arm.

“Ghost! not at all, Mrs. Campbell. I thought you would remember her. Yes, it is Jessie Carrington, that you saw married, you know, to Sir George Artingale years ago, when you were both lasses together.”

“Married,” said Hannah Campbell, in a sort of dreamy, puzzled tone.

“Ay! married, to be sure; there was no harm in that, you know,” said the captain, cheerily.

“Jessie Carrington, be it you?” said the old woman.

“Yes, Mrs. Campbell. It is Jessie Carrington. I think I should have known you. Do you not remember me?” said she who has been called, as she called herself, Mrs. Fraser, speaking, curiously enough, with a much more markedly Scotch accent than she usually did, as her thronging recollections carried her back to the times and associations of her youth.

“It seems to me to remember your voice; but I can’t see ye where ye stand there in the dark. My sight ain’t none so good,” said the elder of the two old women.

Mrs. Fraser advanced to the side of Hannah’s chair, where the light from the window fell full upon her face, and the old servant gazed at her long and searchingly; and then, as it were, half fearfully, put out her shaking hand to take that of Mrs. Fraser.

“Ay,” she said, after a time, “ay, it be she who was Jessie Carrington, sure enough. And what be your name now, Jessie?”

“Well, now,” interposed the captain, “what was the name of the man you saw her married to? Your name is Campbell, you

know, because that was your good man's name, eh?"

The lawyer had hurriedly moved forward a step, as the captain began to speak, apparently about to interpose; but fell back again into his quietly watchful attitude in the background, when he heard his words, as if satisfied with the old gentleman's method of conducting the case.

"Married!" said old Hannah, again. "I thought as she were not married to him for earnest."

"But what was it you saw done, then, that day at Crossmyloof?" said the captain.

"I know'd it warn't right. But it warn't my fault. *I* could not make nor mend in it, not I," said old Hannah, in a fretful tone, that seemed half contrition and half ill-humour.

"Fault. Of course it was no fault of yours, Mrs. Campbell. But what was it you saw?" said the captain.

"As to the bit of paper, she'd ha' lost it if I had not taken it. And it was good for nothing. I was told to take it, that she might not think more of it than it was worth, and go for to fancy that that bit of writing made her a married

woman. I only did as I was bid," said the old woman, whiningly.

Here again Mr. Williams was on the alert; but the captain again showed himself to be equal to the occasion.

"Of course, ma'am, you had to do as you was bid, and acted for the best. No doubt of that. But as there are some who fancy that Jessie Carrington *was* married that day, and some who fancy she warn't, it u'd be a good job now if it could be known for certain what was written on that 'ar bit of paper," said he, coaxingly.

"How should I know—a poor woman like me, that never was no schollard? But if you want to know, or if Jessie wants to know, she may see for herself. For I've kep' the bit of writing safe enough all these years. Bertha!" called the old woman, screaming at the top of her voice.

Her granddaughter had all this time been standing at the other end of the kitchen, behind the group of visitors, listening eagerly and wonderingly to all that had passed.

"Yes, grandmother," she said, moving up to the side of the old woman's chair with a quick and noiseless step.

“Bertha, bring me here the little leather box that stands on the shelf at the head of my bed.”

Bertha went, and returned with a small trunk-shaped coffer, covered with red leather, and all studded with nails, which had been a pretty bit of knick-knackery once upon a time. The old woman took it in her shaking hands, and turned it first one way and then another. Then, looking round at her visitors suspiciously, she said—

“Now, you haven’t brought me the key. Go and—no. I had better go myself. There, you hold the box while I get up.”

Bertha took the box, and the old woman, supporting herself by her hands on the arms of the chair, rose from her seat and hobbled to the door of her bedroom. Then she said—

“Give it to me, child ; I must find the key ;” and so saying, shut the door behind her.

In a minute she returned with the box open in her hand. No key was visible. And she had, in all probability, opened it by some spring, the secret of which she had been afraid of betraying to her visitors. She would not give the box thus opened out of her hand, even to her granddaughter. And being thus prevented

from using both her hands to aid her in seating herself, Bertha had to assist her in doing so.

Then jealously raising the lid of the box, so as to expose the contents of it as little as possible to the eyes of those in the room, she took from among them a paper folded like a letter, and carefully reclosing the box, said—

“There, there is the paper—a mighty small matter to make such a fuss about. There it is, just as I took it, being told to, out of her Bible, just after they got into the carriage to go away back to England. My orders was to burn it. And I don’no’, I am sure, why I didn’t. I just put it away, and thought no more about it. And there it is, and if it’ll do any good to anybody at this time o’ day, they’re welcome to it for me. I am sure I did not mean to do any harm. But, Lord forgive me, I’d ha’ done anything he bid me do, let alone taking a bit o’ paper.”

The last words had been said more apparently to herself than to those around her. And she seemed to fall into a sort of reverie, muttering to herself from time to time such phrases as, “Yes, I would”—“Well, well! that’s all past and done wi’!”—“I knew it, when I saw’d un here the

first time!"—"He be the very pictur of Sir George! Well, well, well! All things must come to an end, I reckon."—"What a man he was!"

Meantime Mrs. Fraser had taken the yellow-looking paper from the old woman's hand, and had allowed Mr. Williams, who had eagerly pressed forward at the moment of the production of the document, to take it from hers.

The lawyer stepped quickly towards the further window of the kitchen, followed by Lancaster, leaving the others still standing around the old woman's chair.

After a minute's eager examination of the document, Mr. Williams, tapping the paper with the forefinger of his right hand, looked up at Lancaster, who was standing close by his side, and said, "I begin to think we shall make a case of it, upon my soul I do. I thought it was rather a wild-goose chase, but this really looks like business."

"What is the paper?" asked Lancaster.

"Neither more nor less than a duly signed certificate of marriage between Sir George Artingale and Jessie Carrington. The marriage was a good marriage; I make no doubt of it,"

said Mr. Williams, again scrutinising the paper closely.

“Who signed the paper?” asked Lancaster.

“The old woman there, and James Campbell, whom I suppose to have been her husband. It is also signed by Duncan Forbes. We must ascertain who Duncan Forbes was,” returned the lawyer; “but perhaps I may alarm Mrs. Campbell if I ask her. We’d better leave it to the captain.”

Meantime Captain Curling, after saying a few words to reassure the old woman, while Mrs. Fraser was taking the opportunity of making acquaintance with Bertha, whose position with reference to her grandson had been explained to her by the captain in their many talks during the voyage, took his leave of her, and turned to quit the cottage. The others followed him into the porch, but as soon as they were outside, the lawyer said—

“Look here, captain. We have not quite finished our work with Mrs. Campbell yet. I want you to go back to her, and just find out quietly, without frightening her, who the Duncan Forbes was who signs this document. I say,” he added, as the captain, taking the paper, was

turning to re-enter the cottage, "don't let the paper out of your hands, you know, for fear of accidents."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the captain, putting his hand, with the document in it, into his coat pocket.

Lancaster, and Mrs. Fraser, and Mr. Williams lounged on slowly down the path that led to the church, and stopped at the stile into the churchyard for the captain to rejoin them.

"One of the finest properties in England, I should say, ma'am, that your grandson seems likely to come into here. Very extraordinary case. Make a great sensation from one end of England to the other, ma'am," said Mr. Williams, admiring the fine view of the Castle from the spot where they were standing.

"My boy George to be the owner of all this! I can't believe it. It seems like a dream. I can't believe it is true yet."

"It looks very like it though, upon my word, ma'am. We shall see what news the captain brings us—there he comes—of Duncan Forbes. I don't see what can set aside a marriage so attested. Well, captain, have you got any information? Who was Mr. Duncan Forbes?" said Mr. Williams.

“The old soul made no difficulty about telling me all she knew,” replied the captain. “Duncan Forbes was the son of the landlord of a little public-house at the village of Crossmyloof, near Glasgow. He was a young man of two or three and twenty, or thereabout; and it seems he played the part of a minister, and pretended to marry Sir George and my old friend here, in a room of his father’s house.”

“Pretended to marry her. He might pretend to be a minister, or what you please, but his testimony to the marriage is just as good as another’s,” said the lawyer.

“To think o’ that,” exclaimed the old lady, holding up her hands to heaven, “to think o’ that. I never doubted the young man was a minister from that day to this.”

“It don’t matter a straw whether he was or not,” said the lawyer. “Scotch folk don’t seem to think so much of parsons as we English do. By their law a witnessed marriage is none the worse because there was no parson to perform it.”

“You don’t say so,” cried the captain, in much astonishment.

“I do say so—there is no mistake about it.

But what we have to do now is to ascertain whether this Duncan Forbes is still alive. If he was only twenty-three at the time of the marriage he well may be," said Mr. Williams.

"And then what?" said Lancaster.

"Then our case will be proved, and I shall know what steps to take. I do not anticipate any difficulty if this Duncan Forbes be still alive. He can have no motive now for wishing to conceal the fact and the legality of the marriage. And he would run much greater risk of getting into trouble by denying his signature than he would by owning it," observed Mr. Williams.

"But what about his having pretended to be a clergyman?" asked Lancaster.

"Who is there to accuse him of having made any such pretence? The pretence was in no wise needed for the legality of the marriage. No minister of religion was at all necessary for the due contracting of the marriage. Duncan Forbes is a witness to the contract of marriage entered into by the parties—that is all," returned the lawyer. "I think," he added, "that the best way will be to write to Glasgow in the first instance, and ascertain if there be such a person

still living. He was the son of a publican at the village of Crossmyloof, you say. I have a correspondent at Glasgow to whom I can apply for this information. Then, if he is still living and to be found, as we must hope, I think that I must run down to Glasgow, and ascertain what evidence he can give. I will write by this evening's post."

The little party then returned to Woodbine Cottage, where they did not find Fraser. He had left it soon after they had set forth on their errand, his business being in the same direction, though it was of a very different nature from theirs. He had been very unwilling to be left behind when the others had started for the cottage, but the captain would not hear of his accompanying them. As soon as they had been gone a few minutes, however, instead of waiting to hear the result of their visit, which would in all probability go far towards deciding whether he was to be Sir George Artingale and lord of Artingale Castle or no, he had started after them, and hanging about in the vicinity of the cottage, had watched them out of it, and had then run in to his love. It was wonderful how little impression the question of the chances before

him seemed to make on the mind of the young American. He still pictured to himself his bride in a comfortable little house at Salem, or Newport, or Marble Head, under the wing of his grandmother, and amused his fancy with the possibilities of one day persuading her to share a cruise in a charmingly fitted up little state-room, when he should have become a captain, with a venture of his own in the voyage.

As to Bertha, no vaguest thought of any such impossible fairy-tale metamorphosis as that which should transmute her from little Bertha into Lady Artingale had ever crossed her brain. The two lovers had hardly ever exchanged a word upon the subject, and Bertha's day-dreams for the future were all sketched in on backgrounds of the same tint as those of her future husband.

On the present occasion Bertha told him of the visit her grandmother had just had at the cottage, and of some paper which the old woman had been asked for, and spoke much of having seen his grandmother—and of the few short words she and Mrs. Fraser had been able to exchange—and of how sure she was that she should love his grandmother dearly, and the

like. But nothing was said between her and her lover of the miraculous change which was hanging over their prospects. Bertha's mind had never yet opened itself to the possibility in question. And as for George, he had a persuasion at the bottom of his heart, that let them poke out what facts they might about what happened to his grandmother half a century ago, the king of England would never permit him, mate of a merchantman, and a good citizen of the rebellious whilom colony of Massachusetts, to become, by a sort of heigh-presto pass, Sir George Artingale, a baronet of the kingdom of Great Britain.

Meantime Mr. Williams wrote that afternoon to his Glasgow correspondent, and received in due course of post a reply, informing him that Duncan Forbes was still alive, a hale and hearty old man, landlord of the public-house which had been his father's in the village of Crossmyloof. And on the receipt of this information the lawyer lost no time in starting himself for Scotland.

CHAPTER III.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS ARE VISITED
ON THE CHILDREN.

AND all this time the family at the Castle were wholly unaware of the tremendous, the crushing blow, that was about to fall on them.

Sir Hildebrand continued to be absorbed by the progress of the works at the Castle. And Lancaster had during these latter days, since it had become apparently almost certain that that of which he had at first conceived a vague suspicion almost by a sort of divination was the real truth—Lancaster had found it so painful to him to be compelled to keep silence while listening to the baronet's plans, and hopes, and criticism, and witnessing his pleasure in the restored fabric, and his anticipations of joy in its completion, that he had taken leave of absence

for another visit of a few days to Sillchester. He was anxious, too, to confer with his kind friends there on the present aspect of the Artingale affairs. It was now almost certain, since the certificate had been recovered, and it had been ascertained that Duncan Forbes was yet living, that it would be fully and unquestionably shown that the poor Scotch lassie, who had been so cruelly shipped off to the colonies, was then and was now Lady Artingale,—that the supposed marriage of Sir George with the Lady Geraldine Tarlatane had been no marriage at all,—that the present (supposed) Sir Hildebrand was consequently illegitimate, and had no right whatsoever to the title or the estates of Artingale; and that the American mate in the merchant service, hitherto known as George Fraser, was in fact Sir George Artingale, and owner of the Castle and estates.

But there was one aspect of the matter, which, as the reader will readily imagine, touched Lancaster much more nearly than all these consequences of the facts which had come to light. Mary Artingale would be now no longer the great heiress to a proud line of knights and baronets and vast estates. She would be a poor

girl, utterly portionless and unprovided for in any way. Lancaster found it wholly impossible to prevent himself from contemplating these facts as gifts of fortune more precious than he could ever have dared to imagine. There was no longer any insurmountable barrier between him and Mary. Yet his conscience smote him for finding a source of joy in her downfall from her high estate. Could he but have read her own heart, he would have known that he needed not to torment himself with such thoughts. He would have known that that downfall, when it came, would, save for sorrow for her father, come to her as a deliverance and a possibility of happiness, shut out from her for ever by her present position.

A possibility of happiness, if only she on her part could have read his heart. And partly, dimly and uncertainly, she did read it. She had at least glimpses of it. But those glimpses, circumstanced as she was, brought with them nothing of consolation or support under the unhappiness that made her days a dreary blank and her nights sleepless.

Not that she had been called upon to sustain any further open contests with her father on

the subject of Felix Farland's addresses. But she knew that he considered the irreversible fiat to have gone forth ; that he conceived her to be all this while making up her mind to the obedience which he and " Artingale " required of her. She knew that the struggle must come all the more terrible for the deceptive lull that preceded it. In truth, for Mary Artingale, those days were days of great suffering and trouble.

Yet it might perhaps have been possible for her to draw some rays of comfort and hope from the conduct of her suitor, if her mind had been sufficiently free and at ease to speculate calmly on the manifestations of it. From time to time Felix renewed his suit ; and Mary wearied, saddened, and sickened, had to reiterate repulses which had already been clothed in so many fashions that it had become impossible to attempt any further variations of refusal. But a certain change of manner might have been noticed by a shrewd looker on in Felix's love-making. He took his refusals more easily. One would have said that he almost appeared to like them, and registered them one after the other with a certain degree of satisfaction. They were, doubtless, reported as quickly as they occurred to another

person, to whom the tidings of them were not unwelcome.

And thus matters continued at Artingale and at Farlandstoke during the days of the absence of Mr. Williams on his journey to Scotland.

At Sillchester the Henningtrees were greatly moved at the tidings Lancaster carried to them, and at the near prospect of a disturbance in the social atmosphere of the Sillshire world, which might be likened in its consequences to an earthquake of the most portentously violent kind in the physical world. Mr. Henningtree felt uneasy at the secrecy which had hitherto been observed with respect to the coming catastrophe. It was painful to him, and Lancaster fully shared the feeling, to know that this terrible thunderbolt was about to fall, and to abstain from uttering any word of warning to those whom it was about to crush. But he agreed with Lancaster, when the latter pointed out to him that it would have been unjustifiable in every way to have bruited abroad rumours of such suspicions while they were still suspicions only, and that any such warning would have been wholly useless to Sir Hildebrand. Lancaster told him that both he himself and Captain Curling had wished that

the necessary communication should have been made to the baronet as soon as the certificate of the marriage had been recovered from old Hannah. But the idea of doing so had been abandoned, he said, at the urgent wish of Mr. Williams the lawyer, whose professional caution was averse to open fire, as he said, before he had got his guns duly into position. Finally, Lancaster admitted to his friends that the position had been so painful to him himself, that it was a desire to escape from it which had prompted his visit to Sillchester.

He had, however, promised both the Captain and Fraser that he would return to Artingale by the time the lawyer was expected back from Scotland. And after some little trouble he persuaded Mr. Henningtree to return thither with him, the latter stipulating, however, that their journey should be so timed as to coincide as nearly as possible with the return of Mr. Williams, and the consequent open announcement of the discovery which had been made. "For," said he, "it would be altogether beyond my power to sit with Farland hour after hour, knowing all about what was coming, and yet forbidden to say a word of it."

Mr. Williams returned punctually to Woodbine Cottage on the day on which he had calculated that he would be able to do so. And Lancaster and Mr. Henningtree, arriving a few hours later on the same day from Sillchester, learned within half an hour of their arrival that the lawyer had obtained from the man he had been to visit a most complete and circumstantial account of the marriage, that, in short, the evidence of it was now perfect and unexceptionable, and the result was quite beyond doubt.

What was the next step to be taken? In what way would it be most considerate to break the terrible news to the baronet? Of course the task of doing so fell to Mr. Williams. His first idea was that the better plan would be to write to Sir Hildebrand on the subject. He himself would thus escape the painful duty of making by word of mouth such a communication as that which he had to make. All the others, however, of the little party to the secret, assembled at Woodbine Cottage, including now Mr. Henningtree, were of a different opinion. They thought that the unfortunate baronet would need a number of explanations and proofs which, let the written communication of the lawyer be as ex-

plicit as it might, would necessarily become the subject of subsequent letters, and thus the unhappy man be kept in a state of terrible suspense longer than was necessary. They urged that the shorter plan was the best for all parties. And Mr. Williams with some difficulty consented to carry the tremendous tidings himself to the Castle. Of course the earliest was the best moment for doing this, and it was determined that the lawyer should walk over to Artingale that same afternoon.

Mr. Henningtree said that he would go to Farlandstoke and communicate the facts to his old friend Mr. Farland, whom he had not yet seen since his arrival from Sillchester.

Lancaster determined to remain at Woodbine Cottage with the captain and Mrs. Fraser till the return of the lawyer from Artingale. Fraser himself had been absent from the little council at which the above moves had been decided on in his favour. Where he was the reader will have little difficulty in guessing.

Mr. Henningtree and Mr. Williams left the cottage together, and their roads for a short space lay in the same direction.

“I suppose,” said the former to his companion,

as they left the cottage, "that there may now be considered to be no further room for doubt in this unhappy matter?"

"None at all, I should say, sir," returned the lawyer. "I should think that Sir Hildebrand's legal advisers will scarcely recommend him to attempt to dispute our case. May I ask, Mr. Henningtree, if you are personally acquainted with Sir Hildebrand?"

"Yes, I have met him several times. I have no intimate acquaintance with him; but I know him sufficiently well to be able to assure you that you have by no means a pleasant or easy task on your hands, Mr. Williams."

"Is he so intractable a man? a very passionate man, perhaps?" returned the lawyer.

"Not so much that—you will find him intractable in one sense. He is a pompous, haughty man, with very exalted notions of his own position. But I was not thinking of that so much as of the terrible nature of the blow you are called upon to deal. I cannot conceive a man to whom such a reverse of fortune would be more overwhelming. I think it will kill him."

"Is it so bad as that?" said the lawyer,

thoughtfully. "Are you aware, sir," he added after a pause, "whether the unfortunate gentleman has any means independent of the Artingale estates?"

"I should say nothing at all, or nearly nothing. His wife, the Lady Lavinia, probably had something; it could not have been much. Perhaps there may be enough from that source to stave off actual destitution. Luckily, very luckily, there is but one child—a daughter."

"Poor man! poor people!" said the lawyer, with a sigh.

"There," said Mr. Henningtree, pointing to a path which led to the entrance to Artingale Park, "your way lies there. You cannot miss it; you will come to the park gates in less than half a mile, and I heartily wish you well through your task. I do not above half like mine, which is to tell the news to an old friend and neighbour of the family. Good morning, sir, and good speed."

"Good morning, sir, and thank you for your good wishes," returned the lawyer; and so they parted.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOW FALLS.

MR. WILLIAMS was not a happy man as he pulled the bell at the door of the inhabited wing of the Castle.

“Was Sir Hildebrand within? Could he speak with him on business?”

Sir Hildebrand was somewhere about the Castle, the servant thought. He could go and see.

“And be good enough to say that Mr. Williams, of the firm of Wiseman and Williams, solicitors, of London, wishes to speak with him on urgent business.”

“Yes, sir,” said old Richard, with a mystified and somewhat awe-struck look.

The baronet was soon found, and Mr. Williams was requested to walk into the study.

"My name is Williams, Sir Hildebrand, of the firm of Wiseman and Williams, of Broad Street, London."

"So my servant told me, sir. I am not aware of having ever heard of the name of your firm before, and——"

"No doubt, Sir Hildebrand. Quite so," said poor Mr. Williams, nervously. "I have called, Sir Hildebrand, upon a very disagreeable business—a very unfortunate business indeed; and I hope you will believe, Sir Hildebrand, that the duty that devolves upon me is a very painful one to me."

"Well, sir, let us hear it at once, whatever it may be," said the baronet, with a considerable dash of *hauteur* in his manner, and at the same time motioning his visitor to a seat. "Allow me to ask, in the first place," he continued, when Mr. Williams had seated himself on the edge of the chair indicated to him, "on whose behalf you come here; for I presume that you are not the principal in the business you allude to."

"I have waited on you, Sir Hildebrand, on the behalf of, and as the representative of a gentleman hitherto known as Mr. George Fraser."

“What, the young American, who has been in this part of the country for some time past? What on the earth can there be between him and me? Pray be quick, sir, for my time is precious,” said the baronet, who had only habit to help him in the heavy work of getting through the four-and-twenty hours.

“Certainly, Sir Hildebrand. I will be as brief as the nature of my business will permit. My client, as you observe, is an American, having been born in that country—the son of a father who was born in England. That father, Sir Hildebrand, was the son of your father, Sir George Artingale.”

Now it should be observed that Sir Hildebrand had never heard any allusion whatever to any of the circumstances relating to his father’s connection with the lady so cruelly sent out of the country. Nor is it at all surprising that such should have been the case. Sir George had died when his son was yet a child, and the subject was not one on which it was at all likely that the baronet should speak to any one.

“What!” cried the baronet, frowning heavily, but rather from a feeling of mystification than any other emotion; “what, do you mean to

say, then, that this young man is my nephew—that is to say as far as any such relationship can be said to arise from an illegitimate connection—which you, Mr.—a——”

“Williams, sir, of Wiseman and Williams,” put in the lawyer.

“Just so—which you, Mr. William Wiseman, know better than I can tell you is just nothing at all.”

“Quite so, Sir Hildebrand. You are quite right. An illegitimate child being, as we say, *nullius filius*, can acquire by his birth, and *à fortiori*, can transmit to his own descendants no ties of relationship to the family of his sire. Quite so. But, Sir Hildebrand, the fact is, that the father of my client, Mr. George Fraser, was the legitimate son of your father; and Sir Hildebrand,” proceeded Mr. Williams, with hesitation, and an air of compunction, looking as if he was on the point of bursting into tears, “not only so, but he was—the—the *only* legitimate son of the late Sir George.”

“What! what! what!” cried Sir Hildebrand, jumping from his seat as if it burned him, and taking his stand with his back to the empty fireplace; “what! what! what! Do I hear

you aright? Have you come here to tell me—" and Sir Hildebrand almost choked with the thought of the meaning of the stranger's words, as it began dimly to rise up in the background of his mind.

"I implore you to be calm, Sir Hildebrand," said the lawyer, timidly.

"Calm! what the devil do you mean, sir, by telling me to be calm? Calm, indeed! What do you mean, sir?" reiterated the baronet, fiercely.

"Only, Sir Hildebrand, that it is enough to make any gentleman lose his calmness—it is indeed, Sir Hildebrand; and it is very distressing to me—very distressing indeed, Sir Hildebrand, to be obliged to say such things to a gentleman in his own house."

"Distressing! I should think it was, too," snorted the baronet, taking a turn across the room, and then reseating himself in his chair. "Now then, Mr. William Wiseman," continued he, pronouncing the three last words separately, and with a strong emphasis upon each, "do let us understand what cock-and-bull story it is that your employers have got into their head, and what is their drift. But I may as well tell you beforehand that they have not got hold of the right

sort of person for their object," said the baronet, somewhat inconsistently with the ignorance of that object implied in his previous question. "I am not the man, as you will find, Mr. William Wiseman, to be frightened, or bullied, or cajoled, or intimidated—yes, frightened, bullied, cajoled, or intimidated,—frightened, bullied, cajoled, or intimidated," repeated the baronet, finding much moral support from the repetition of the words; "and any of my neighbours hereabout could have told you as much, if you had asked them."

"Indeed, Sir Hildebrand, we have no thought of the kind—indeed not, sir. But the facts which you ask for are briefly as follows. Your father, Sir George Artingale, previously to his union with your mother, the Lady Geraldine Tarlatane, daughter of the Earl of Foxley, was duly, legally, and regularly married to a lady whose maiden name was Jessie Carrington, and who—I grieve to have to say it, Sir Hildebrand—was living at the time of the pretended marriage with the Lady Geraldine, and who is still living. It follows, therefore, as you will yourself perceive, Sir Hildebrand, that the supposed marriage with the Lady Geraldine was no marriage at all,

and that the legitimate issue of the marriage with the aforesaid Jessie Carrington is the true heir to the title and estates of Artingale."

Sir Hildebrand turned very pale, and a cold sweat suddenly formed itself into large beads on his forehead. But in the next moment the utter impossibility of the story told him, as it seemed to his mind, reassured him. If there was any foundation for such a story, would it not have been heard of long before now? It was monstrous, impossible, absurd. And if, as was very likely, this lawyer was speaking in good faith, why he had been made a fool of, that was all. But, on the other hand, it was very possible that this stranger was himself the scoundrel concocter of some fabrication got up for the purpose of extortion. He had heard of such things, and of strange rascalities which lawyers had before now been guilty of.

"Look-ee, Mr. William Wiseman," he said, after a pause, during which these thoughts had been passing through his mind somewhat slowly, as was in accordance with the nature of that machine, "I suppose you do not expect that I should believe this very likely story you have had the audacity to come here and tell me?"

“ Oh, dear no, Sir Hildebrand, certainly not. Nobody would dream of accepting such a story as truth, except on the very clearest and most irrefutable evidence. And you must allow me to say, Sir Hildebrand, that our firm would not think of setting up such a story unless they were prepared with such evidence to support it. Certainly not, Sir Hildebrand. Unfortunately, sir, the evidence is but too clear and indisputable. It consists simply in the duly attested certificate of the marriage between the late Sir George and Jessie Carrington. It will, of course, be necessary to furnish indisputable evidence of the fact that the young man known as George Fraser is the legitimate son of another George Fraser, now deceased, who was the issue of the marriage between the late Sir George Artingale and Jessie Carrington. And it is right that I should state at once that, with reference to these questions of identity, our firm has no knowledge or information whatever. But at the same time I am bound to say, that there seems reason to believe that there will be no difficulty whatever in establishing them beyond all possibility of cavil. It so happens that a neighbour of your own, Sir Hildebrand, whose name at all events

is no doubt well known to you, has been well acquainted with the widow of the late Sir George Artingale, and with her son during his life, and with the young man who now claims to be the heir for many years. And besides his own testimony, he assures us that evidence to any amount as to the facts of identity, and other points can be had at any moment in the town of the colony, now state, of Massachusetts, where these persons have been living in good repute, and well known generally to their neighbours."

"Good God!" cried the baronet, so to call him still; "do you really mean to tell me that all this is true?"

"I fear, Sir Hildebrand, that it is. But, as I said before, it is not to be expected that you should accept the story on my showing. It will be for your legal advisers to see whether they can find any hole in it."

"But if my father were legally married to this Jessie Carrington," said the baronet, again, "how is it possible that the marriage should have been concealed, not only at the time, but during all these subsequent years? How can it have happened that no claim arising from the fact of such marriage, if it were true, should ever

have been preferred during all this time? how is this credible?"

"The facts are very strange," returned the lawyer; "but the questions you very naturally ask, Sir Hildebrand, are easily answered. Jessie Carrington, then legally Lady Artingale, was made to believe either that the marriage was not a legal one, though we have undeniable proof that it was such, or that it was hopelessly out of her power to establish its legality. And under that persuasion she consented to leave England for the colonies, and under the same persuasion has refused ever since till now to reveal even to her own son, or to his son, who had been the father of her child. And, Sir Hildebrand, had it not been for the unlikely chance of this young American sailor coming to sojourn in this part of the country, where certain stories related by him in chance conversation respecting the wrong which had been done to his grandmother, the nature of which he was well acquainted with, though he had no knowledge of the wrong-doer—had it not been for this chance, which, joined to a singular likeness between the young man and several members of your family, and a comparison of dates and so

forth, set the minds of certain persons on the track of the facts, the truth would never have come out."

"Good God! good God! good God!" ejaculated the unhappy man, again rising from his chair, and pacing to and fro in the little room in evidently terrible distress. He stopped short at the window, and standing there with his back thus turned to his visitor, and his head sunk on his breast, remained in silence for a while; and Mr. Williams said no word to disturb his thoughts. When he turned round and again came back to his chair opposite to the lawyer, he seemed to the eyes of the latter a changed man. The thinkings of those minutes seemed to have done the work of years in aging him. One would have said that his cheeks had fallen away in the interval. His lips were trembling and his face was ashy pale.

"And supposing, which of course I do not admit, sir, that the story you have related be correct, what would be the results which would, that is, which in your view of the case, would follow thereupon?" said he, striving hard to speak with composure, and without the semblance of emotion.

“The consequences,” said Mr. Williams, speaking with real pain and distress, “would be that my client, known hitherto as George Fraser, would now and henceforth be known as Sir George Artingale, and that he would enter into immediate possession of the estates.”

“And I and mine! Can it be that the law after so many years would sanction so monstrous an iniquity?” said Sir Hildebrand, seeming to speak rather to himself than to his visitor.

“The action of the law,” returned Mr. Williams, speaking in a low and almost solemn voice, and with a manner, the unconscious product of the genuine emotion which he experienced, which astonished himself in the subsequent recollection of it, “the action of the law, Sir Hildebrand, would be to redress iniquity. Think of the wrong done during these many years to the rightful Lady Artingale, to her son, and to her son’s son. The evil brought on you has been terrible; but the wrong done to them has been greater.”

“God help me! God help me, and mine!” said the unhappy man. The room seemed to him to be going round and round. A horrible sensation of sickness came over him; his head

sunk down upon his chest, and he fell from his chair to the floor heavily, to the extreme terror and trouble of his visitor, who thought for a moment that the blow had killed him.

Springing to his side, he strove to lift him ; but the huge bulk of the man, whose stertorous breathing showed that he was not dead, but only fainting, made this a task altogether beyond the lawyer's strength. He loosened his neck-cloth, and was doubting whether he should not quit him for an instant to call for help, when, to his infinite relief, the door was opened, and an old gentleman entered, whom Mr. Williams had never seen before.

It was Mr. Farland.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISPOSSESSED FAMILY.

“GREAT heaven! Is he dead? Has it killed him?” exclaimed Mr. Farland, springing to his old friend’s side with an agility greater than could have been expected from his years, and kneeling down by the side of the huge prostrate form.

“No, sir; no; it is not so bad as that. He has fainted. If we could have a little water——”

“Richard!” called Mr. Farland, aloud. The servant had opened the hall door for him, but had not accompanied him to the door of the study. “Richard!” he called again, stepping hastily to the study door; “bring some water here; quick! your master is not well.”

The old servant came running as fast as he

could, and in a very short time brought water. The application of it did not immediately succeed in recalling Sir Hildebrand to consciousness. They raised the massive head and shoulders, loosened the ligatures of his dress, and then, slowly, consciousness began to return.

“That will do, Richard. Now leave your master to us, and do not say anything to the ladies. It would only alarm them unnecessarily. It has been merely a slight fainting fit, of no serious consequence. Sir Hildebrand is recovering now. There, that will do. Shut the study door.”

“You know, sir——” said Mr. Williams, in a low tone of hesitating inquiry to the new comer.

“From Mr. Henningtree,” said the other, nodding.

“Mr. Farland, I presume. Indeed, sir, I strove to break it to the poor gentleman as gently as I knew how.”

“Ay! but there are things—— Reach those cushions from the sofa to prop him up with. That will do—hush!” added the old gentleman, holding up a warning finger, as he perceived that the blood was beginning to return to his friend’s cheeks.

“What, Farland! Is that you?” said Sir Hildebrand, with a great sigh, turning his eyes slowly towards his friend. “What has been the matter with me? Who is—oh! God help me! Yes; I remember it all now. Farland, what is to become of me? What is to become of us all?”

“We shall see, my dear friend, what is best to be done. We shall talk things over quietly together. You feel better now, eh? That is well. Now, I think, sir,” he added, turning to Mr. Williams, “that it would be better to leave us together. Will you let me see you at Farlandstoke this evening? I should like to have some conversation. And in the mean time, of course it will be well that nothing should be said.”

All this had been said rapidly, and in a voice but little above a whisper, to the lawyer, who replied in the same tone, nodding, and stepping towards the door, “Shall we say at eight o’clock, sir; will that suit? Very good. At eight.” And so the two old friends were left together.

“You know then all about it, already, Farland? It is very kind of you to come to me,” said the baronet, as Farland returned to

him from shutting the study door after Mr. Williams.

“I heard it from Henningtree—and, of course, came to you. directly, my dear friend.”

“Do the women know anything—poor things, poor things?”

“Nothing as yet—nothing. We must talk it over.”

“Talk, Farland,” said Sir Hildebrand, with a heavy sigh; “what can talking do? I suppose,” he added, with a half shy, wistful glance into his friend’s face, “that there is no hope that this terrible story may be false?”

“I fear not, I fear not, from what Henningtree says; I fear that we must not buoy ourselves up with any such hope.”

“That man said that, of course I should not believe the tale on his showing.”

“Oh, yes; mere words, of course. Of course your lawyer will verify the statements put forward. But, my dear friend, I should be deluding you, if I told you that I, for my part, have any hope that they are other than the truth. Henningtree happens to know something of the firm to which this lawyer belongs. They are very respectable people, of good stand-

ing in the profession. Then, again, we all know that what old Curling states of his own knowledge of this young man and his grandmother must be the simple truth. And then the certificate of the marriage produced by your father's old servant, and the additional evidence obtained from the other surviving witness to the marriage. I fear, I fear, that we must not delude ourselves with any hope on that score. Would that it were otherwise."

"My poor child! What is to become of her? Oh, Farland, I wish that I had died when I lay fainting just now. I wish that I had died. Such a blow ought to kill a man; and I think it will kill me," said the unhappy man, moving his head from side to side with a weary motion.

"Nay, my friend; you must bear a stronger heart than that. You have done well in the position which was thought to be yours. Few that have borne the brave old name have done better or more for it than you have; disgrace is the only thing which a man cannot stand up under; no disgrace touches or can touch you. Be it how it may, Artingale will be a debtor to you for long years of judicious care and good management. These are considerations that

ought to be worth something to you at such a moment."

"But with regard to you yourself, Farland?" said the baronet, in a tone which indicated that his friend's consolations had not been altogether thrown away upon him; "think of my position with regard to you."

"Tut, tut! the lawyers will settle that somehow or other with the estate. I don't know how that may be. Any how, the money was advanced and used for the benefit of the property; and you, under the circumstances, can have nothing to do with it. And, what's more, let it go as it may, it won't hurt me; I've enough; so don't trouble your head about *that* matter."

"You are too generous, Farland. But I should hope that the estate would be liable for the money."

"I should think so; any way, never mind it. But I was going to point out to you, my friend, one source of great consolation which this misfortune brings with it. Providence generally mingles something of good in the bitterest cup. Heaven has given you only a daughter. And had you been your father's true heir, the name

would have perished—more or less perished—perished in the direct male line. As it is, the line, it may be hoped, will be continued unbroken. Is not this a great ground of consolation?”

“It is, my dear friend; it is a great ground of consolation; and I should be unworthy to have borne the name if I did not feel it to be so,” said the ex-baronet, as it is now necessary to call him. “It is a very great consolation,” he continued, with an air of compunction and conviction; “and I take shame to myself that it did not occur to me before. Thus it is that Providence justifies its ways to man, as the Bible says. It is a justification of Providence, and I humbly bow before it. Still, it is hard—very hard to bear.”

“It is very hard, Artingale—very hard. But you will have the respect of all the world among whom you have lived—the respect and the sympathy. And that is a great help in bearing any stroke of fortune. And all those who bear, or who hereafter may bear the name of Artingale, will know and feel that few of the line have done more for it than you have.”

“It is very good of you, neighbour, to say so. I have tried to do my duty by Artingale—I have,

indeed. But now it is of the bare means of subsistence that I have to think. What is to become of those unhappy women?"

"Oh!—means of subsistence? things must be arranged; there will be no question about means of subsistence. To begin with, my friend, I suppose that there must be something that was the Lady Lavinia's?"

"There was something—very little. There it is, whatever it was—between two and three hundred a-year, I think; and Agnes has about twice as much of her own—the inheritance of our great aunt, Miss Artingale of the Moat House at Sillchester."

"Well, that is something. And then we must see what can be arranged. Now, my dear friend, there is another matter in which, perhaps, I might be useful. The ladies—would you rather that I should undertake for you the task of breaking these tidings to them, or do you think that it would be better that you should do it yourself?"

"Oh, Farland! It would be a great charity if you would do that for me; I do so dread it. I can never thank you sufficiently for all your kindness."

“Not a word of that, my friend. If neighbours can’t be neighbours in a case like the present, it were a bad look out indeed; now then I will leave you. If I were you I would go out for a quiet walk. It will tend to tranquillize you more than anything else; and I will go on my mission to the ladies. It is not a pleasant one, certainly.”

To this the baronet made no reply, save by a melancholy shake of the head, and a cordial pressure of the hand Mr. Farland held out to him. And as soon as the latter had left the study, he prepared to follow the last advice that had been given him. He took his hat and gloves, and was on the point of quitting the room, when he turned back, and reaching up to the hook over the fire-place, on which the great emblazoned pedigree was hung, he carefully and reverently took it down, and spreading it on his writing table, took a pen, and from its place at the bottom of the sheet, erased his own name, drawing through it a thick black line, and writing opposite to the place, with a firm hand and clear characters, the words *BASE BORN*. Then he hung the sheet up again in its place, and went out.

Mr. Farland meantime went to perform the very painful task he had with such true friendliness undertaken. Calling a servant, he desired him to go to Miss Agnes, and say that Mr. Farland was anxious to speak with her. - He knew that the unusual form of the message would be sure to cause Miss Agnes to receive him alone.

He went to her in the little boudoir looking on to the terrace, and there shortly and swiftly, but as considerately as he could, put her in possession of the terrible facts. Of course the shock was a dreadful one ; but she bore it far better than her brother had done. She did not affect to deny that it was very painful to be thus on a sudden cast down from the high place she had heretofore occupied ; but her regrets were chiefly on behalf of her brother. Mr. Farland remarked that in what fell from her there was scarcely any word with reference to Mary. Her sister-in-law, poor Lady Lavinia, occupied much of her thoughts too. She knew that it would be very dreadful to her. But of Mary, to Mr. Farland's surprise, she said very little.

Could he have read all that was passing in her heart, he would have seen that, as regarded herself, Miss Agnes was chiefly thinking of a

certain scene that had passed on the terrace-walk, in the garden of the Moat House at Sillchester, and of the futility of the sacrifice that had there been consummated.

“I promised my poor friend that I would communicate this sad news to you, Miss Agnes, in order to spare him the pain of doing so. But perhaps it will be as well for you to break it to Lady Lavinia, and to Mary.”

“I think so ; I will lose no time in doing it. But I think that I would rather first speak to my brother. It is he who will most need consolation. Is he in his study ?”

“I think not ; I advised him to go out for a walk, and I fancy he went. Tell him that I shall make a point of seeing him early to-morrow morning. I shall have some conversation with the parties who are putting forward this claim this evening ; and I will be here soon after breakfast to-morrow.”

“God bless you, Mr. Farland, for your kindness to him, and to us all, in this season of distress,” said Miss Agnes, giving him her hand.

And then she rang the bell, and desired the servant to beg Miss Artingale to come to her.

Mary had left her aunt in the boudoir when Mr. Farland's message had been brought requesting to see the latter, and she came from her own room now, fully expecting to hear that the old gentleman's visit had had reference to his son's suit to her, and that a new phase of the battle she had to fight was now about to commence. Her first glance at her aunt on entering the room showed her that the matter on hand, whatever it might be, was of very serious import, and of no agreeable kind.

"Mary, my dear," said Miss Agnes, in a tone which, if it could not be called cheerful, was at least calm and measured, "come and sit here by me on the sofa. I have something very surprising and very serious to tell you."

"Very surprising, aunt?" said Mary, already surprised.

"Yes, dear, *very* surprising, and at the same time very sad. A very great misfortune has fallen upon your father—and upon us all."

"Good heavens, aunt! What is it? Tell me at once. I thought——"

"In one word, then, my child, not to keep you in suspense, your father is no longer Sir Hildebrand Artingale, no longer owner of this

Castle and estate ; you are no longer a great heiress, but a poor girl as wholly unprovided for as the poorest girl of your acquaintance in the village."

Mary seized her aunt's hand, and looked into her face with wide-opened eyes, while a crimson flush overspread her whole face. The truth was that the first feeling which her aunt's announcement had occasioned was one of immense relief. Vague images of evils of a very different kind had risen in her mind on hearing her aunt's few prefatory words—of a different and to Mary a far more intolerable kind. Then all such fears were as suddenly and effectually dissipated. Then there flashed across her mind the thought how often she had of late repiningly compared her lot with that of the poorest girl of her acquaintance in the village. And the thought of why she had envied such a lot, and of what she had dreamed might have been hers if her lot *had* been such, was sufficient to cause the blood to rush tingling to her cheeks. But then came a feeling of deep self-condemnation and shame that such should have been her first emotion at the hearing of such tidings, that she should have positively felt relieved at learning

that which must cause such misery to all whom she loved best. And then, as this thought passed through her mind, conscience anew upbraided her and taxed her with falsehood in ranking either father, or mother, or aunt, or home as that which she loved *best*.

She remained gazing open eyed into her aunt's face, while the burning blushes covering her entire face and forehead might have seemed to proclaim her consciousness that she was the wicked cause of the misfortune which had befallen them all.

"It is even so, Mary. We are wrongful usurpers and intruders here, and have no choice but to go forth into the world, while the rightful owner takes our place."

"How can this be, aunt?" said Mary, in a low voice, scarcely raised above a whisper.

"The story is a long one to tell at length, dearest. It is sufficient to know that no shadow of blame of any kind is attached to your dear father, or indeed to any one now living. Your grandfather, Mary, Sir George Artingale, my father, whom I never knew, concealed the fact that he had a son living by a lawfully married wife at the time when he married my mother.

(Miss Agnes did not deem it necessary in speaking to her niece to explain more accurately the true nature and consequences of her father's fault.) That elder son, therefore, ought to have succeeded him in the baronetcy and the estates. That son is no longer living. But *his* son, my father's grandson, is now Sir George Artingale, and the owner of all that we have hitherto possessed."

"And how was this found out at last? Of course papa knew nothing of it," said Mary, still speaking in an awe-struck tone.

"Of course your dear father knew nothing of it. Nobody knew anything of it. Nobody, as I have said, nobody now living has been to blame. That is not quite so, either," she added, as the recollection of the part played by old Hannah came to her mind; "there were witnesses to my father's first marriage who might have told the truth; but perhaps they were scarcely accurately aware of it and of the consequences of it. Probably not."

"But you have not told me, aunt, how all this came to be found out now," said Mary, again.

"That is the most extraordinary part of the

story, Mary. You know that young American sailor, in company with whom we dined at Farlandstoke, some months ago, and who is to be married to little Bertha?"

"Certainly. Mr. George Fraser," said Mary.

"That young man, Mary, is Sir George Artingale, he being the son of my father's eldest son."

"Aunt! Is it possible? Is it possible?" cried Mary, holding up her hands in extremity of astonishment, and appearing to be more struck by this personification, as one may call it, of the catastrophe that had happened than she had been by the first announcement of the fact.

"And little Bertha, then, will be Lady Artingale of Artingale Castle," she added, still breathless with astonishment.

"Even so, Mary; if, as I think, our American acquaintance, George Fraser, be too good and honourable a man to let his changed fortunes interfere with his love," said Miss Agnes, smiling with a faint and melancholy smile at the phase of the consequences of the great change which had been foremost to suggest itself to Mary's mind.

"Oh, aunt, how could you dream of such a thing? It would be too monstrous. If Mr.

Fraser is to be lord of Artingale Castle, little Bertha will be Lady Artingale, sure enough. It is very wonderful—very wonderful! Little Bertha, Lady Artingale! Well, if such changes are to be, I'm sure there is no one whose promotion I would so willingly see."

"But, Mary, you seem hardly to realize the results of this wonderful discovery to yourself—to us all," said her aunt, thinking within herself that she could understand the feelings that seemed to have the effect of blunting her niece's sensations to the sharpness of the misfortune which had befallen them.

"I do feel very keenly for my father, aunt. It will be a very dreadful blow to him. I am very sorry, very sorry for him. Poor dear papa! He loved this place so dearly. Believe me, aunt, that I am deeply grieved."

It was curious that the half latent consciousness of the great reason she had for *not* being grieved at the catastrophe which had fallen out should thus lead her to protest—sincerely enough—that she did grieve for that at which it seemed so much a matter of course that she should grieve. But her aunt thought that she understood it all.

“And your poor mother, Mary,” she said.

“Yes,” returned Mary, “I am not forgetting poor mamma. But, do you know, aunt, I do not think that the blow will be nearly so great to her as to papa. Does mamma know it yet?”

“No, dear. Your father had heard no word of the matter till this morning. It is terrible to think of the suddenness of it. And now I have the painful duty before me of telling your poor mother. I cannot tell you how I dread it.”

“Shall we be altogether without the means of living, aunt?” asked Mary, after a pause, during which her mind was busy with many things.

“Your father, I fancy, Mary, will have nothing whatever, save the small fortune which your mother brought him—something very small. I, fortunately, have a little less than five hundred pounds a year, which was left me by that dear great-aunt by whom I was brought up, and of whom you have so often heard me speak. She left me all she had to leave, because it was supposed that my brother was the heir to all the estates. If the truth that has now come to light had been known then, of course she would have left her property equally between us. So that what I have is my brother’s as much as mine.

Altogether, we may have perhaps between seven and eight hundred a year to live on."

"And surely, aunt, that must be sufficient for our real needs?" said Mary.

"Young people who have always had all they wanted are apt to imagine that their needs are few before they make the attempt to reckon them up. Such an income as that would not be sufficient, for instance, to give you your horse and groom, Mary. It would not be sufficient to keep eight or ten servants. It would not be sufficient——"

"Never mind counting up all that it would *not* suffice for, aunt. The catalogue would be a long one. Of course, I know that there must be some self-denial. But would there not be enough for all real necessities?"

"Real necessities is a very elastic term. Who shall say what it includes?" returned her aunt, with a somewhat sad smile. "Certainly, there is enough for decency and for modest comfort—for all that ought to be necessary to anybody. But now, darling, I must go to your poor mother. I shrink from the task, Mary."

Miss Agnes did go to her sister-in-law. Shrink-
ing from a duty did not mean, in her vocabulary,

not doing it, or even putting it off. She went to Lady Lavinia, and had, as she had expected, a very painful scene with her. Nevertheless, it was not so much apprehension for the loss of comforts made necessary to herself by long habit, that Lady Lavinia grieved, and wept, and complained, and fretted, and maundered over. To do the poor lady justice, she was most pained for the pain of her husband ; and then, next to that, the thought of " what people would say " was very grievous to her.

That painful task, however, came to an end, as the worst hours do. The most dreadful, heaven be thanked ! has but sixty minutes in it. And the dinner-time came, as dinner-time always does ; and the stricken family sat themselves in their accustomed places around the melancholy board, and got through the sad evening as best they might. There was not much conversation among them, for each was busy reviewing the past and the future, by the light of thoughts and feelings which were very different in each of the little party. Undoubtedly the head of the family suffered most. Lady Lavinia was most actively miserable, and did, I suppose, suffer next most. Miss Agnes

suffered ; but more for the others than for herself. And though Mary was unfeignedly sorry for her father's sorrow, I do not think that she could be said to have been suffering at all during the long nearly silent hours of that dreary evening. Her thoughts were alternating between building castles of her own in the air, of a far more lovely beauty than that of the castle which was to be taken from her, and rebuking her fancy for permitting itself any such thoughts at all.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

MEANTIME Mr. Farland's first care on leaving the baronet—so to call him still—was to ride as fast as he could to Woodbine Cottage, for the purpose of having an interview with Mr. Williams.

The lawyer shook his head when Mr. Farland, introducing himself as an old friend of the Artingale family, adverted to the extraordinary statements which had been put forward.

"It is one of the cruellest cases of the kind I ever heard of," said the lawyer.

"But of course you will understand, Mr. Williams, that we do not admit the facts to be as stated. They will have to be proved in open court."

"Of course, Mr. Farland. It is quite a

matter of course, as I endeavoured to impress upon Sir Hildebrand himself, that he should admit nothing. We must furnish thoroughly satisfactory proof of every statement which goes to the setting up of our claim—the legality of the marriage, the identity of the parties, and so on. But, Mr. Farland, I may say to you confidentially, and I say it as one who really would rather that the claim should break down than be substantiated to the causing of so much misfortune—it is a bad business. There is not a ghost of a chance of setting the claim aside. We have proof of the marriage, both documentary and oral—the evidence of two witnesses, who both acknowledge their own signatures, and state that they were present at the marriage. The parties have lived—grandmother, son, and grandson—in the same neighbourhood during the whole lapse of time, and are well known to large numbers of respectable persons. There is not a chance. I can truly say that I wish there were. I believe that my client himself would be almost better pleased to find that it was not his fate and his duty to turn this unfortunate family out of the place which they have so long occupied. I do indeed.”

Mr. Farland rode home from Woodbine Cottage far more slowly than he had ridden thither. He meditated much as he rode; and the first result of his meditations was a perfect conviction that what the lawyer had said was true, and that there was no possible ground for doubting that his old friend and neighbour would assuredly be compelled to give up his title, his home, his property, to the rightful owner of all those things.

As soon as he reached his own house he walked directly into the library, and ringing the bell, desired the servant to send Mr. Felix to him. Felix was at home, and came directly.

"Have you heard the news, Felix?"

"About the Artingales? Yes, sir; of course it can't be true," said Felix.

"But it is true, though. As sure as you stand, it is true. And our old friends will be stripped of everything they possess."

"You don't say so, sir. What on earth will become of them?" said Felix, speaking with the utmost dismay.

"I will tell you one thing that may become of them—or at least of one of them, Felix—it was

to speak of that that I sent for you. Miss Artingale may become Mrs. Farland."

"But, sir, it has been going on all the same as ever, between Miss Artingale and me," said Felix, colouring up; "I have never been able to get anything from her but refusals."

"Well, you must now try yet once again, Felix. It cannot be that you should press Miss Artingale to become your wife when she was supposed to be a great heiress, and should give up your pursuit as soon as she is known to be nothing of the kind. That would never do for you or me. You must go to Miss Artingale, and try yet once again if you can induce her to listen to you. And I am sure that I need not point out to you, Felix, that your honour is concerned in causing Miss Artingale to feel that your anxiety to win her to be yours, is, to say the least of it, not less than it was when she had Artingale Castle to her dower."

"But if she refuses me again, sir?" said Felix, with rather a downcast air.

"In that case," replied his father, "you will have done all that honour can require of you. You may, I think, under the circumstances, consider another refusal to be final. You had

better ride over after breakfast to-morrow morning."

Felix did ride over the next morning, as his father had suggested. It cannot be asserted, I am afraid, that he was very anxious to prevail in the suit he was thus once again about to prefer. The *tête-à-tête* walk with Lucy Hathaway, which the reader wots of, had not been the last of its kind. And he had a sort of feeling that it would be hardly fair if after so many refusals under the circumstances that had existed hitherto—refusals which had led him into falling very much in love with his old playmate, the pretty and sympathizing Lucy—he were to be now accepted by Miss Artingale. It is, however, but just to poor Felix to say that he was very strongly persuaded that no such acceptance awaited him. He had no great gift for reading character, or capacity for comprehending a nature of the order of Mary Artingale. But he had seen enough of her during the days of his duty courtship to feel tolerably sure that no change of fortune would produce any change in her conduct as regarding the matter in hand. Nevertheless, he *was* capable of fully entering into the feeling which had

prompted his father to wish that the offer of his hand should be made yet once again to Miss Artingale. And his main preoccupation during his ride to the Castle was how he should acquit himself becomingly of the task assigned to him.

He asked the servant if Miss Artingale was at home, having determined that if, as he thought most likely, he should find Miss Agnes with her, he would ask her boldly to come and take a turn with him on the terrace. It so happened, however, that Mary was alone in the little terrace room. It was past twelve when Felix reached the Castle; and Miss Agnes was upstairs with the Lady Lavinia.

Mary was sitting near the window when he entered, without any book in her hand, with no drawing before her, no feminine work of any kind—apparently absolutely doing nothing—naturally enough, as the thought occurred to Felix—brooding doubtless over the sad misfortune that had fallen upon her.

She sprang from her chair, as if roused from a reverie, as he entered the room, and came towards him with a little hand extended in greeting with a bright frankness of manner that he could not but feel to be strongly con-

trasted with the sort of reception she had lately been wont to accord to him. There was no trace of trouble or sorrow either in her bearing. She was bright and almost joyous in her manner.

It seemed very strange. Felix was altogether puzzled, and thrown out of the course he had with much study chalked out for himself in the coming interview.

"I came, Miss Artingale," he said, awkwardly, as soon as they were seated, "to—a—to express——"

"Yes; it is very kind of you, Mr. Felix. Your father has been most kind. I know how truly you sympathise with us in the misfortune which has fallen upon us. It is very, very sad for my poor father. Indeed, indeed my heart bleeds for him."

"It will be sad news for the whole county, Miss Artingale. There will not be a man high or low in Sillshire but will feel it to be a misfortune. But for us who are—who are such old friends, you know, it is—the very deuce and all," said Felix, after casting about for an appropriate expression.

"I am sure you feel for us kindly, Mr. Felix."

“And then you know, if all the county feels, think how I must feel, Miss Artingale! Can't you guess what I am come for this morning, Miss Artingale? Say the word, and take Farlandstoke instead of Artingale. I know you have given me 'no' instead of 'yes,' often enough. But then that, I know, is only a way girls have. But now it is serious, you know; do think better of it; will you think better of it, Miss Artingale, and say yes, once for all?”

Mary shook her head.

“My kind, good, dear friend, the 'no' must still be 'no.' Believe me, Mr. Felix, I feel all the generosity, all the nobleness of your visit here this morning, and its object; I shall never forget it. But,” and Mary dropped her eyes to the ground, while a bright blush covered her cheeks, as a sudden thought seemed to come into her mind, “see now,” she continued, putting out her hand to take his, “to show you how grateful I am, how truly I appreciate your conduct, and how dear a friend I hold you to be, I will tell you a secret—upon condition, Felix,” she said, with a sly laughing look up into his face, “upon condition that you tell me a similar secret as soon as you have got one to

tell. Felix, I cannot accept the offer of your hand—so generous an offer under the circumstances—because I am engaged to another. I think it is due to you to give you this reason for my rejection of your suit.”

“Why, Mary, you don’t say so?” cried Farland, in a tone that was, it must be admitted, by no means that of one who hears a decision that must consign him to despair. “Well,” continued he, vigorously shaking the hand she had put into his, “’pon my word, I—” and there Felix stopped short, and suddenly became as red as a peony.

“Don’t stop short, Felix,” said Mary, laughing out; “upon your word you are delighted to hear it. That was what you were going to say, was it not, now? Tell the truth. And very well said too. Ha! ha! ha! and I will say as much to you, Felix, with all my heart, when you come to tell me your secret.”

“Come now, Miss Mary, don’t be too hard upon a fellow.”

“Hard upon you; not I. You know, Mr. Felix, that you have got such a secret to tell, or very soon will have.”

“And who is the happy man, Miss Mary?”

“Oh, you will know all in good time. I am not going to tell you.”

“I know who it is. I’ll bet I know.”

“Then why do you ask me?”

“It is Purcell Lancaster.”

Mary coloured and hung down her head, turning herself away from Felix, who still held her hand as she did so.

“Do you know, Mary,” said he, slowly and solemnly, “I believe there is a Providence in these things. If you had remained what everybody supposed you to be, the heiress of Artingale Castle, you never could have married Mr. Lancaster, you know. Now, you may almost consider that in the light of a consolation for the loss of fortune. Mayn’t you now, Mary?”

“I think I may, *almost*, as you say, Felix,” replied Mary, looking up at him with a laugh in her eyes.

And Felix rode back to Farlandstoke with a lighter heart than he had carried thither, to tell his father the result of his errand, and his news. There was another person, too, to whom he was anxious of communicating these tidings at the earliest opportunity. And I suspect that

before the five o'clock Farlandstoke dinner-bell that day, Felix was in a position to have told Mary the secret she had bargained for hearing.

The honourable and generous feeling of Mr. Farland had caused him to be very prompt in sending his son with the offer of his hand, as has been related. But, as we have seen, another had, nevertheless, been beforehand with him. No sooner had it become evident to Purcell that both Mr. Henningtree and Mr. Farland considered it clear that the extraordinary claim to the title and estates of Artingale put forward on behalf of the grandson of Sir George Artingale, was one to which no resistance could be made, than he had determined to lose not an hour in telling Mary of his love. He had succeeded in finding her alone about an hour before the Castle breakfast-hour, and having asked her to take a turn with him upon the terrace, there told his tale.

And Mary made no pretence of concealing her love, or the fact that nothing would have induced her to listen to it or to him in disobedience to the commands of her father, and of the ideas which would have assuredly been the

rule of her conduct, had her position remained what it had been.

“Neither, my heart’s idol, should I have ever dared to address you with words of love. Oh, Mary, if you could but know half that it has cost me to determine to act as I knew that honour required of me! Never, never, never, could I have thought of or looked at another. I should have carried a broken heart with me throughout life; but I should not have asked for your love.”

“And the result would have been that I should have made my pilgrimage in as sad a plight, Purcell, for you had got my love without asking for it. Oh, Purcell, did you not know it?”

“If I ever dared to picture to myself the possibility, I could only pray that it might not be so for your sake, my darling.”

“Misery enough there would have been, any way, Purcell. I should never have married another, loving you as I did; and that would have made unhappiness at home. Poor, poor, papa! if only it were not for his sake, how delightful a change of destiny would this loss of fortune be!”

And in similar strain they continued to chatter on till the breakfast-bell warned them that it was time to separate. And Mary went into the breakfast-room with that in her face and eye which, despite her efforts to attune her bearing to the sore trouble that she knew was in her father's heart, betrayed to the shrewdness of her aunt sufficient indications of what was in her own, to lead Miss Agnes very strongly to suspect the truth.

In another hour her suspicions had been confirmed by Mary herself, and she had received her aunt's warmest congratulations.

The story of the singular circumstances under which Artingale Castle changed owners has been told. Were there space for the purpose, the reader might be told at length of the wonder, the incredulity, almost the dismay, with which little Bertha learned that she, within as short a delay as possible, was to become Lady Artingale, and be required to change her residence from the cottage to the Castle. He might be told how Miriam Henningtree claimed and received the Sillshire moor landscape, as her husband's lost bet on the marriage of Mary and Felix Farland. It is, indeed, essential that he

should be told that Sir George Artingale (late George Fraser) and Mr. Farland came to a perfectly satisfactory arrangement respecting the money that had been advanced for the restoration of the Castle. It was settled in the first place, that the new owner recognized the debt as due from the estate ; and, in the second place, that Mr. Farland should continue to supply, as needed, the funds for the completion of the work. In a year or two, the arrangements which had been made for the clearing of the Artingale estates from old debts would have accomplished their object, and the estate would be free. Now, Sir George proposed that as soon as that was completed, a still larger portion of the rental — the whole of it, indeed, with the exception of a few hundreds—should be applied to extinguishing the debt to Mr. Farland. And he declared his intention of living, until that should be accomplished, with all the simplicity and economy to which he and his wife had been accustomed.

Lancaster, with his wife, and her father, mother, and aunt, were to remain, meanwhile, in the part of the Castle which they had

hitherto occupied, where the young architect's professional earnings, together with Lady Lavinia's small fortune, and what Miss Agnes possessed, would suffice for their wants calculated on a moderate scale. It was hoped that this arrangement avoiding any great change in the baronet's habits of life, would help to break the crushing violence of the blow which had fallen upon him. It availed but little, however, towards any such object. Had it been discovered that the title and estates of Artingale belonged to some other Artingale and not to him, so as to leave him still his own proper place on the family pedigree, and his nook in the family chapel, I do not think that he would have been crushed by the discovery. But the cause of his own deposition—those two words that he had written with his own hand opposite to his name, on the great sheet of the family pedigree—“*base born!*”—that was the iron that entered into his soul. And it did its work as well as if it had entered into his body. It killed him before the time when the new baronet took up his residence at Artingale.

As for Lady Lavinia, Dr. Hathaway continued to visit her daily; and duly made out porten-

tously long bills for draughts, and mixtures, and pills, which were regular in every respect save that they were never sent in.

Miss Agnes continued to be the providence of her niece, and, in due course, of a grand-niece, named after her. Lancaster, as his old friend and master had predicted, throve apace, and became one of the great men of his profession. He executed many great works in different parts of England in after years; but it will surprise nobody to hear that in his own opinion the restoration of Artingale Castle was by far the greatest work he had ever accomplished.

Lastly, the reader will surely be pleased to hear that Lucy Hathaway became Mrs. Felix Farland, with the somewhat caustically given consent of old Mr. Farland, who said sundry severe things upon the occasion; and, indeed, upon many a subsequent occasion in the married life of his son and daughter-in-law. But as they were mostly couched in quotations from the Greek and Latin poets, they did not materially disturb the happiness of the family circle at Farlandstoke. And, in fact, Lucy and the old gentleman became great friends and allies

when, a few years later, that clever lady sided altogether with her father-in-law, when some opposition of opinion arose between him and Felix, respecting the early indoctrinating of a younger Felix with copious doses of book-learning.

THE END.





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